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ISSUE 636

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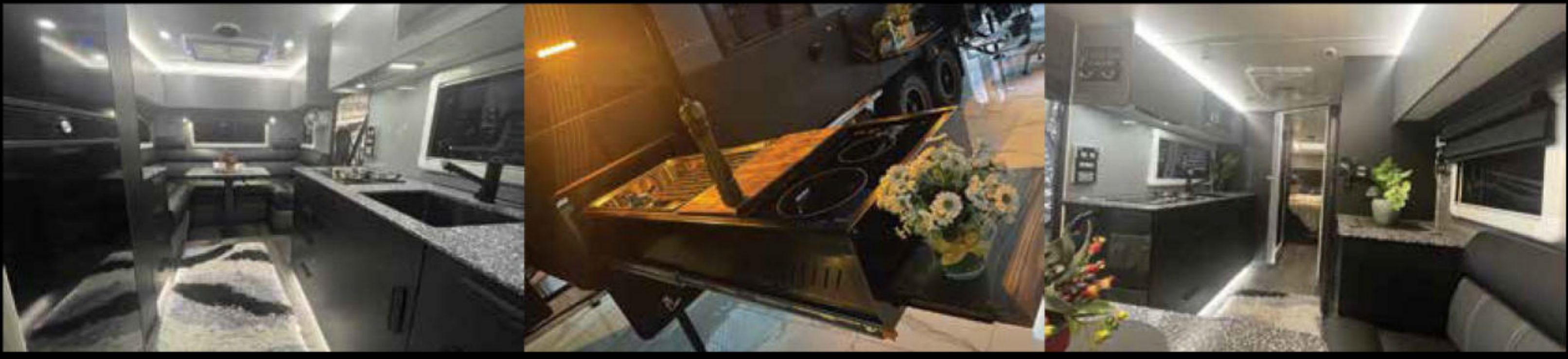

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FIRST WORDS JOHN FORD

Like thousands of fellow grey nomads, we are back on the road. We met up with a group from the Trakmaster Offroad Caravan Club in Narromine a few days ago, and we are on our way along the Oodnadatta Track to The Alice and west to Marble Bar, WA, across the Gary Junction Road. The club brought together 90 Trakmasters for their annual gathering at Narromine, and it was great to catch up with some friends, including Colin and Prue Kerr, who are long-time Trakkies and contributors to *Caravan World*.

The club celebrates its 20th anniversary later in '23 with a gathering in Tallangatta, Victoria, and the committee has asked me to promote the event to owners who aren't members, and I'm happy to oblige. You will find the contacts for the club on the web.

But this has me thinking that we should offer the same consideration to other caravan clubs. If other clubs around caravan brands are anything like the Trakmaster group, then there's a lot you can gain by getting involved. Members love nothing more than passing on tricks and suggestions about their vans, and there are numerous opportunities to join a travel group to any number of locations. For example, on our current trip, we will be travelling to some remote spots, and there are years of experience from members to call on if we get in trouble. Not only that, there are old hands who know all the best camps and sights along the way.

So, let us know if other clubs are interested in promoting their events. If there's enough interest, we could run a list of clubs and contacts and organise a calendar of events.

Similarly, we are looking into making *Caravan World* more relevant in the caravanning community. We talk a lot about safety and the best way to enjoy your caravanning lifestyle. We have been kicking around the idea of a *Caravan World* group for a while, but the events of the last couple of years have gotten in the way. It's time to broaden our reach and give something back to our very loyal readership.

We should make some special offers to a *Caravan World* group who agree to a charter of behaviour on the road and when camping. Some ideas might include awareness of other road users, leaving a site in better shape than when you arrive, helping fellow travellers and so on.

I'm keen to hear what you think. Offer some suggestions on how it could work and what you hope to get from it or put into it.

Have fun,
John

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Spinifex Electrex Premier
Photographed by *Phil Cerbu*

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Titan Blackhawk 720 Tardis

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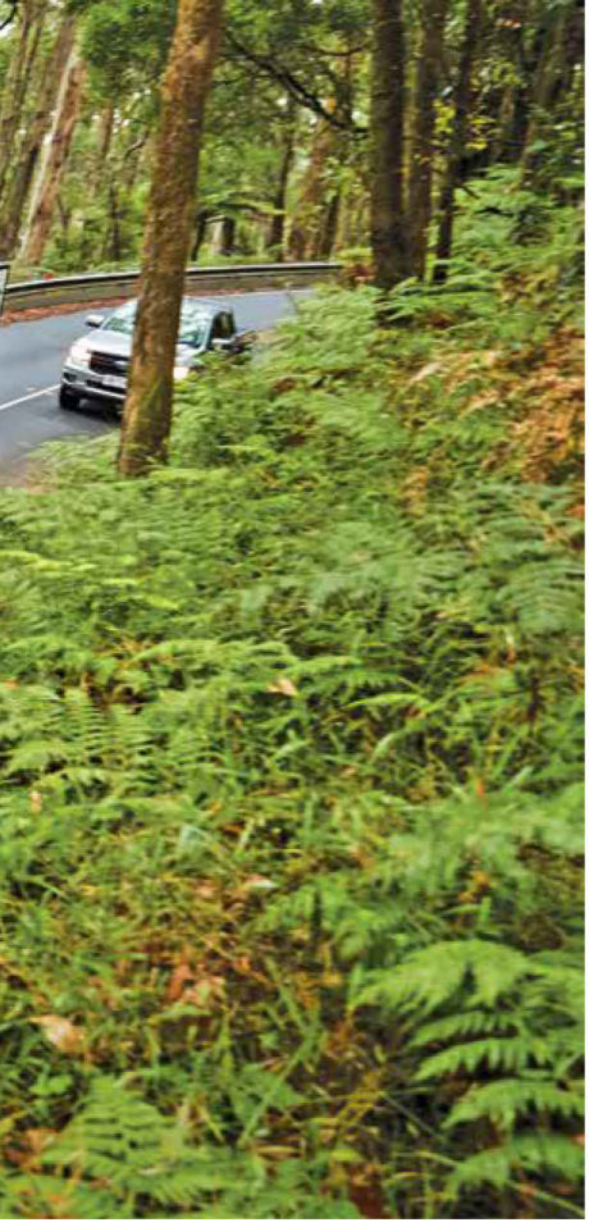

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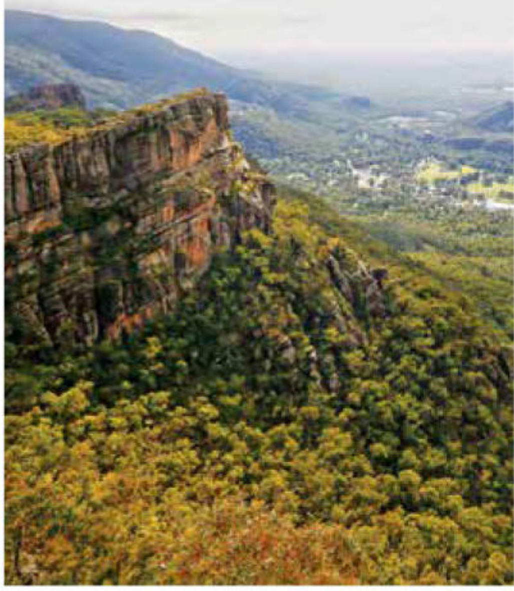

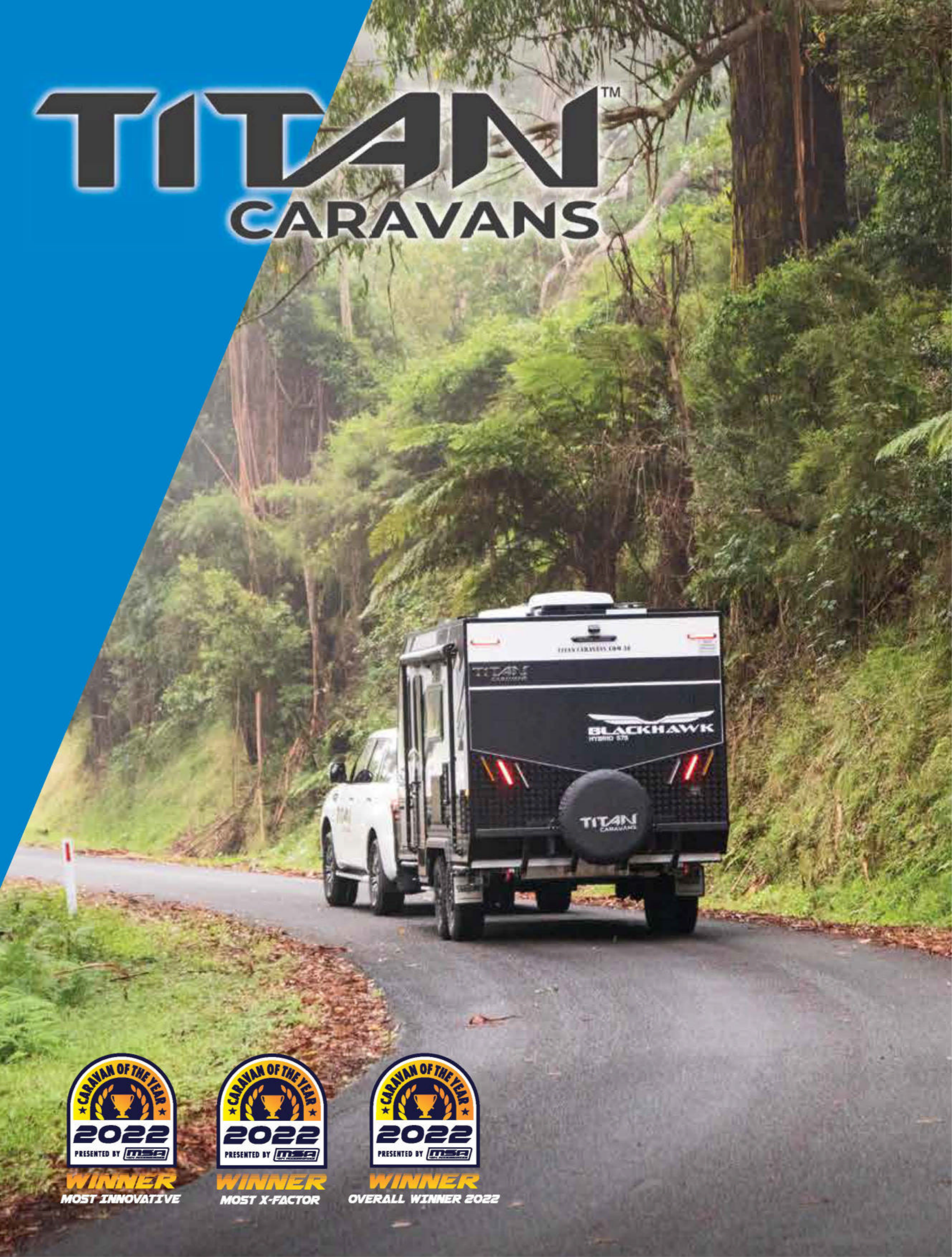
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BMPRO LAUNCHES NEW RANGE OF OFF-GRID SYSTEMS

BMPRO, the Australian-based RV power management experts, has announced the launch of a new range of high-powered off-grid systems over the next 12 months. These systems are engineered to provide customers with reliable and efficient off-grid power solutions, including battery management and charging solutions.

BMPRO's High-Powered Off-Grid systems are designed to equip customers for the modern off-grid adventure. The systems come with higher amp charging solutions that allow customers to go off-grid further and for longer while bringing their home comforts with them. With an optimised cost-to-power ratio, BMPRO's systems deliver all the power customers want without an excessive price tag.

Customers will also benefit from the ability to upgrade and customise their systems as their needs change. BMPRO's products are Australian designed, engineered and made, taking into account the unique conditions of the Australian climate.

To make battery management easier for customers, BMPRO provides a complimentary smart app that is user-friendly and intuitive.

The first product in the range to be launched, the Off-Grid50 utilises the highly reliable BMPRO battery charger with the new ProBoost, all brought together to provide a high amp charging solution perfect for off-grid.

Customers can also take advantage of BMPRO's customer support. The company's product specialist team is always on hand to assist customers on their journey. With market-leading innovation, BMPRO continues to be at the forefront of RV power management.

"BMPRO's new range of high-powered off-grid systems reflects our commitment to providing reliable and efficient off-grid power solutions," said Louise Bayliss, BMPRO CEO. "Our customers can trust that BMPRO's products are designed, engineered, and made to the highest standards, and our customer support team is always available to assist them on their off-grid adventures."

For more information about BMPRO's new range of high-powered off-grid systems, visit www.teambmpro.com.

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ABOVE BMPRO has announced the launch of a new range of high-powered off-grid systems over the next 12 months

BIG RED BASH TURNS BLUE FOR WORLD RECORD ATTEMPT

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BASH
BASH
BIG RED BASH
BASH

ABOVE The Big Red Bash will turn blue for a good cause at this year's event (Image Matt Williams)

With the 10th anniversary celebrations for the Birdsville Big Red Bash set to rock outback Queensland this July, organisers have announced a new fundraising Big Blue Day world record attempt for diabetes research in partnership with JDRF.

The new Big Blue Day will open the Big Red Bash on Tuesday, 4 July, encouraging festivalgoers to dress in blue and purchase a $15 fundraising blue wig for the JDRF, with a special world record attempt being undertaken to break "the largest human image of a country" record, currently held by Romania with 4807 participants.

The aim of the world record attempt is to bring together 5000 Big Red Bash festivalgoers to form a blue map of Australia inside an area that will be mapped out via GPS. The world record attempt will be adjudicated by The Australian Book of Records, which also oversees the event's Nutbush world record.

Already renowned as one of the 'most Aussie' music festivals in the country for its unique outback location and activities that include an all-Aussie music lineup, staging the world record breaking attempt by creating a huge human map of Australia made up of people who have travelled from every corner of the country will take national pride to another level.

Festival owner and Managing Director of the Outback Music Festival Group, Greg Donovan, said: "With John Williamson's True Blue ringing out as we set about creating a new world record will just add to the mood and fun of the activity.

"We're hoping to raise more than $70,000 for JDRF. In 2013 we staged the Big Red Run event in the Simpson Desert outside of Birdsville to fundraise for JDRF as our son Steve had been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes (T1D) in 2008.

"To celebrate the runners completing their 250km, six-day marathon we invited John Williamson to do a low-key performance with little more than a packing crate stage, a generator we borrowed from the Birdsville Airport and a speaker on the side of the 40-metre-high Big Red sand dune.

"Word got out and with no promotion we had hundreds of people come from miles around travel to watch John perform – and the idea for staging a remote music festival in the desert was sparked. I guess not surprisingly we've found that more people would rather travel to Big Red to watch legendary Australian performers sing than run through the desert and so the Birdsville Big Red Bash has evolved to an iconic event that attracts a sold-out crowd and some of the biggest names in Oz rock, blues and country on an annual pilgrimage to the Simpson Desert just outside of Birdsville," Greg said.

The Big Blue Day map of Australia world record breaking attempt will be held on Tuesday, 4 July. After Big Red Bash patrons have purchased their blue wig, they will come together in the main concert area where they will be marshalled into the shape of Australia.

Festivalgoers will have the chance to establish a second world record on Thursday, 6 July, when a Nutbush World Record attempt will be staged to break the record of 4084 Nutbush line-dancers that was set at the 2022 Birdsville Big Red Bash.

The Nut Bush City Limits World Record attempt is also set to form Australia's biggest tribute to Tina Turner, who passed away in late May. So, if you'll be at the Big Red Bash, make sure you register to help create a new world record set to one of her biggest hits.

NEW ADS TO HELP DRIVE EVS ONTO AUSTRALIAN ROADS

ABOVE A new ad campaign has been launched to promote the benefits of EV cars

The Electric Vehicle Council has launched a new national advertising campaign, promoting the benefits of switching to electric and urging Australians to make their next car an EV.

The campaign, which features the tagline "my next car will be…", seeks to capitalise on the rapidly growing consumer interest in EVs.

"We know Australians are eager to make the switch to cleaner driving that would free them from dependence on volatile imported oil," said EVC chief executive Behyad Jafari. "We believe that the more Australians understand the advantages of EVs, the more likely they are to make the switch.

"The ads call on Australians to get behind the push to have a million EVs on Australian roads by 2027, which coincides with the federal government's plan to introduce strong fuel efficiency standards.

"We need to incentivise carmakers to make their best range of EVs available to Australians so that Australian consumers have the same choice as drivers in the United States or Europe.

"Every time a driver chooses an EV they help themselves and they help the nation. If we can accelerate this transition it will lead to substantial benefits for the Australian economy and environment, including reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved city air quality, and energy security."

MOUNT ISA MINES RODEO BECOMES A FESTIVAL

After a record-breaking event in 2022, which saw entries reach 956, a highest-ever purse of $300,000 and the staging of the first ever Mount Isa Mines Indigenous Rodeo Championships, the legendary Mount Isa Mines Rodeo will become a nine-day outback festival this August.

The 2023 Mount Isa Rodeo Festival will take place from Saturday, 5 August to Sunday, 13 August, and will include celebrations marking 100 Years of Mount Isa. Natalie Flecker, CEO of Isa Rodeo Limited, said it was fitting the first Mount Isa Rodeo Festival be staged in 2023. "This year Mount Isa marks its 100th anniversary, and for 64 of those years, the rodeo has been a highlight; a major event that brings together the city, the region and more recently, the country," she said.

"Announcing the Mount Isa Rodeo Festival is exciting, because it features what happens in the famous Red Dirt Arena, as well as all the other events through the week on offer to locals and visitors including the Bell and Moir Toyota Rodeo Arena Ball which raises important funds for local charities, the Hall of Fame program, the Indigenous Rodeo Championships and our incredible entertainment line-up."

The Mount Isa Mines Rodeo has won numerous awards and generated millions of dollars in economic benefit to Mount Isa, Outback Queensland and Queensland

Maryann Wipaki, General Manager HSEC, Glencore Zinc Assets Australia said as a founding partner of the iconic Mount Isa Mines Rodeo, Mount Isa Mines was proud to be a part of the event. "Mount Isa Mines and the Isa Rodeo together have formed a legendary partnership. We've been a sponsor since the first rodeo in 1959. We have always supported initiatives that promote our community and are very excited to see the Mount Isa Rodeo Festival come to life in 2023," she said.

As well as rodeo champions, music royalty headed to the Festival include Jessica Mauboy, The Angels, The Screaming Jets, O'SHEA, Furnace and the Fundamentals and Luke Geiger.

Tickets are on sale now at www.isarodeo.com.au/mount-isa-mines-rodeo/2023-tickets.

ABOVE Liana Woodsbey (17) from Mount Isa with Tyler (12) and Jacy Morton (14) from Longreach at Mount Isa celebrating the festival news (Image Peter Wallis)

Hema maps

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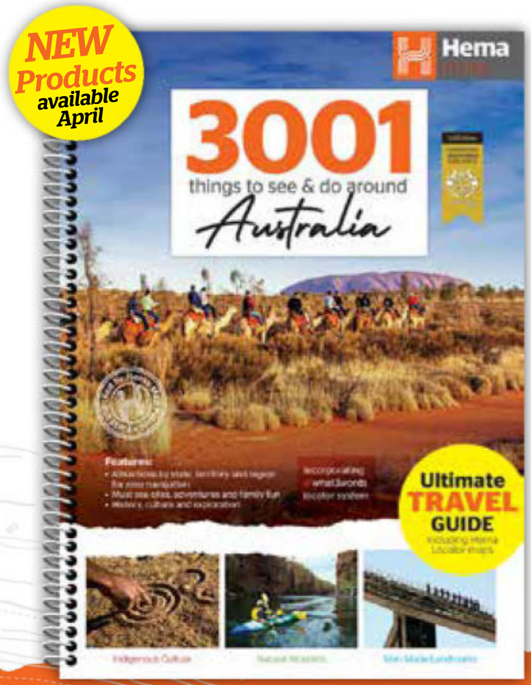
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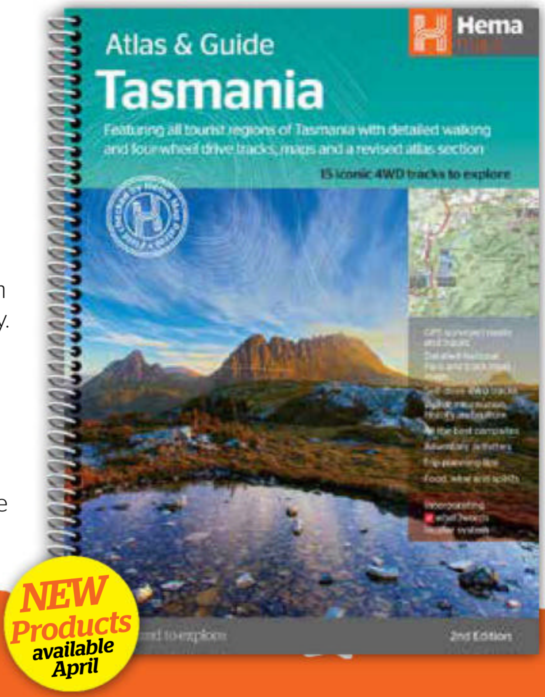
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ABOVE AND RIGHT Horses cross the finishing line in the Birdville Races; Birdsville Races

BIRDSVILLE RACES TICKETS ON SALE

Tickets to the 2023 Birdsville Races are now on sale as organisers gear up to run the most remote horse race in the world on 1 and 2 September.

Staged in the spectacular Simpson Desert of outback Queensland, the Birdsville Races have built a reputation as a truly bucket list adventure – with a rich history spanning 141 years.

"The remote setting and history of the Birdsville Races make it one of the most unique horse racing experiences in the world. Watching thoroughbred horses thunder down our dusty desert track is a true bucket list experience," said Gary Brook, Vice President, Birdsville Race Club.

Ranked in the top 10 of Australia's iconic horse racing tracks, the Birdsville race track is the only thoroughbred dirt race track to be included among the green turf of other renowned racing destinations such as Flemington, Rosehill and Royal Randwick.

The journey to the Birdsville Races through outback Queensland is an integral part of the bucket list experience for grey nomads, intrepid families and young adventurers alike.

This year will see even more rewards, benefits and ways to connect with other travellers included as part of the Birdsville Races Roadie's membership as well as travel routes designed to showcase the best of outback Queensland – from artesian hot springs to Australia's biggest dinosaur, bilby's, Opal fossicking and more.

The recent rains throughout outback Queensland will make for spectacular scenery for Roadies in 2023 whichever direction they're travelling from. Rivers and creeks along the routes will be running, and there will be an abundance of wildlife and native grasses.

The adventure continues when Roadies arrive in Birdsville, with outback entertainment at the iconic Birdsville Hotel, an outdoor cinema under the Milky Way, Fred Brophy's famous travelling boxing troupe, camel pies at the Birdsville Bakery, sunset drinks at Big Red, paddle boarding on the Billabong and a round of golf on the Birdsville Dunes Golf Course where the red sand bunkers are nearly as challenging as the ball stealing crows.

The Birdsville Races is a full TAB meet with the combined prize money for the 13-race carnival topping more than $285,000 as well as bonuses up for grabs across the two days of racing. The TAB Birdsville Cup prize money is $42,000.

Volunteering opportunities also exist at the 2023 Birdsville Races and interest can be registered via the website.

More information and ticket sales: www.birdsvilleraces.com and www.birdsvilleraces.oztix.com.

Get Lost in Luxury

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* Interior image of Cub C16 shown above

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CARAVAN OF THE YEAR

With
MALCOLM STREET

This month Malcolm talks about some of the trends and technologies he noticed when judging this year's Caravan of the Year

ABOVE AND RIGHT A neat idea for understanding caravan construction; The latest in off-grid technology on display

This issue of *Caravan World* and the following one is a little different, primarily because of the considerable effort by Editor-At-Large John Ford and the Emprise team in bringing you the Caravan of the Year (COTY) event. You'll see the results elsewhere, but I wanted to add some general comments.

There was a considerable diversity of caravans and a variation in pricing. These days there's interest in the latter because, sadly, prices are only going one way, and that's hurting everybody. The price variation does make it difficult for the judges. How do you compare a $100,000 van with one worth $250,000? It's difficult not to be influenced by gizmos and gadgets but there's fitness for purpose and which part of the market the caravan in question is aimed at. Several of the caravans were relatively small in length, which does naturally reduce the interior living space. That's not necessarily attractive to everybody, but for those who like to travel lightly and or enjoy the al fresco lifestyle, those smaller caravans are winners. Not everyone has the skills but there's a bit of design art in making the best use of space in more confined interiors.

Offroad caravans were indeed predominant, which is good in many ways but tends to give the slightly wrong impression that vans built for sealed road use won't be good for getting to many parts of Australia. That's certainly not true at all. For one personal example, I'm about to depart on an extended motorhome trip in Western Australia. When we planned our rental motorhome (which does have a few road use restrictions) agenda, at no point in our travel plans did we feel restricted in our goals of where we wanted to travel. Offroad caravans are heavier than their on-road counterparts and frequently require a heavier tow vehicle.

COTY is not just for judging caravans; it's also an opportunity to catch up on some of the latest and greatest caravan technology because manufacturers like to impress. I learned much about the latest developments in lithium (LiFePO4) battery technology, battery management systems and solar panel power. Several COTY entrants greatly enthused that their battery systems could run air-conditioners all day off the grid. Quite an achievement indeed! However, most people's battery power requirements will be more modest. Battery voltages are changing too. For many, the standard system is 12V DC but now 24V, 48V and 51V systems are becoming available. Increasing power requirements mean higher currents and large cable sizes. Higher voltages reduce both. That's particularly relevant with the higher-power inverters that are now in use.

Digressing slightly, changes in AS/NZS 3001.2.2002, the electrical installations standard, means that battery installation locations will change. The short version is that all batteries (lead acid and lithium) must be vented to the outside of an RV and sealed off from the interior. There are other requirements, too, like all inverters must have Residual Current Device (RCD) protection. None of this is surprising, given the increasing complexity of RV systems.

What's not so high-tech is that many upmarket manufacturers still use Meranti timber frames. Old school still works well, apparently, but it's not helping get the weight down in many caravans. Indeed, from the number of large US pickup trucks that turned up for COTY, it's something that many in the industry seem to have given up on. Not good at a time when the western world is moving to more fuel-efficient or alternative motive power vehicles.

What's interesting at COTY is how various manufacturers market their caravans. Some build a fine van but need to provide more detailed information in a digestible and comparable fashion. A factor that's decidedly important when the judges are considering several other vans in the same high-tech price bracket. It alternates between interest and frustration when perusing various manufacturers' websites, not only those at COTY. Some are positively coy about the build of their vans unless you ask.

An issue that many manufacturers are also coy about is customer care/warranty. Getting warranty details sometimes required a bit of digging. In an industry where a caravan can have several different warranty timeframes applied to various parts of the van, it's an item that comes under the comment of 'could do better' in terms of easy-to-find and readability. And that's before getting to the post-sale customer care bit.

Did I have a favourite van at COTY? Yes, I did, a couple. Were they everyone else's favourites? Unlikely because our requirements are likely to differ in a caravan choice. And that, in many ways, is what COTY is all about. You be the judge!

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With
ANITA AND MIKE PAVEY

GOON SHOW

Offroad-ready tipple

FROM LEFT Wine in a can for offroad travel; Barossa ink shiraz; Barossa ink shiraz sparkling

Things have been a little tense around our house over the last few weeks with the western end of the Anne Beadell Highway closed due to rain damage. Cyclone IIsa hit the West Australian coast as a Category Five system but was downgraded as it moved inland, bringing heavy rain and strong winds. Our long-awaited Anne Beadell sojourn was looking shaky.

But just as the tracks closed, they reopened this week bringing big, broad smiles all around.

Friday week, we step off on our first leg to Coober Pedy, so we are down to the pointy end of our preparation.

One area we have been exploring is corrugation-friendly tipple, drinks that won't self-destruct despite the rough roads.

In our early days, we would only drink beer out of bottles, as it offered a better drinking experience, or so we thought. Now a little older and wiser, we prefer cans. They stack better in the fridge and can be crushed once enjoyed, making it easier to store until they can be disposed of responsibly. Craft beer has improved the taste of beer, even out of cans, so the taste argument no longer applies.

Bottles, be it beer or wine, can be an overhead once consumed, taking up valuable room as rubbish.

More recently, we have been experimenting with wine packaging, in particular boxed wine of sorts that could be of use with our offroad adventures. So, we set out to discover what options were available. In doing so, our goal was to support South Australian growers.

We found three different products, a 2L cask of merlot by Winesmiths (Barossa); a 1.5L Grant Burge ink shiraz pouch bagnum (Barossa); and Off Track Wines in 200mL cans (Adelaide Hills).

Of those, we reckon a 2L cask is easier to pack than a bigger cask. It can fit into more places and offers good stack-ability. Of the packages tested, it offers the largest volume and the most pocket-friendly price at $13.99. A 2021 vintage and 13 per cent alc/vol completes the stats. The taste is best described as acceptable.

Next was the ink shiraz pouch 1.5L bagnum at $32.99. We have regularly purchased the bottled ink shiraz in sparkling and still varieties, so we were keen to give this option a nudge. The name bagnum is derived from a 1.5L magnum, and with its goon bag origins at least in this format, it's a clever spin on the name. Grant Burge claims bottled-wine quality and a 30-day life once opened, which you would expect given the price point. Like the cask, it was a 2021 vintage but with 14.5 per cent alc/vol. The quality of the packing and the wine is next level. Smoother, tasty and something we would buy again.

Canned Off Track Wines are available in red wine, white wine, rose, sparkling red, sparkling white and frizzante. The quality is good. We liked the mixed case of 12, which included two of each style, offering more versatility. The 200mL can is a good size for consumption and the wines vary from 11 per cent to 14 per cent alc/vol. Available in 12 packs, pricing starts at $98.50 or $118.50 for a mixed case.

If you thrive on numbers, the 2L cask is $7 per litre, the Bagnum $22 per litre and the cans are a whopping $41 per litre or around $10 each in a mixed pack.

It should be noted that all wine was purchased – no product was donated. Of the three, we preferred the ink shiraz bagnum. While it doesn't stack as well as the 2L cask, we don't plan on carrying too many. It is smoother, tastier and is the closest of the three to bottled wine. And it has by far the coolest name!

If bang for buck is your key criterion, the 2L cask is likely to appeal.

Happy sipping! See you on the trails.

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GETTING OFF-GRID

David answers a letter from a reader renovating a mid-90s van so it can go off-grid for a few weeks at a time.

With
DAVID BAYLISS

Q Hi David,
I am doing a rebuild of a mid-90s 19ft offroad caravan and I want to start the power system from scratch as the batteries are very old and the single solar panel would be out of date. I want to be able to get off-grid for up to two weeks at a time. What do you recommend will be enough lithium battery and solar power to be able to run a 180L compressor fridge and the lights and so on for two weeks?

Thanks,
Graham

A Hi Graham,

It sounds like a great project to work on and sure will be very rewarding to see the finished product. A clean slate to start the project is also ideal as there are obviously a few things to keep in mind when first starting a project like this, such as the location of the system, internal wiring and the cabinetry you will be building around these.

Let's first start on the actual style of setup you are describing. As you want to stay off-grid for extended periods of time, the compressor fridge is the best choice here due to its efficiency especially in hot conditions. They also typically perform well in rough terrain. Caravan compressor fridges operate similar to home refrigerators, using a compressor with moving mechanical parts to cool. They can be powered by 12/24V and 240V sources. The consumption of your fridge will vary depending on whether you have solely a fridge or a fridge/freezer, and the setting you want for each compartment. Then you need to determine the environment you are planning to travel. Travelling the hot outback will definitely consume more energy as the caravan heats up every day.

Generally, a fridge is going to be rated at consuming between 2–5 amps per hour, however this will of course vary depending upon the ambient temperature and how often you open and close the door. A compressor fridge at home will generally cycle around 20–30 per cent of the time, however you need to remember that a home generally has better insulation properties than a caravan. You are in control of your own destiny here, so consider adding additional insulation around the internal cabinetry where you install the fridge to reduce its requirement to cycle as often. Now, as fridges run 24hrs per day I would suggest you take an average of 3 amps per hour and, to be conservative, have a buffer. Calculate that 50 per cent cycling gives you 3Ah x 24hr x 50 per cent = 36Ah.

The balance of your energy consumption is primarily going to be in lighting and charging devices such as phones or mobile speakers. In my experience, with off grid-camping you find that LED lights and charging up a few phones consumes only about one-third of what a fridge consumes. Therefore, at most you might consume a total of 48Ah per day. In my experience this is a fair bit of power, however it will depend heavily upon four key factors – the quality of fridge you purchase (cheaper = higher energy consumption), the ambient temperature, installation and usage.

The next consideration is how you are going to replace all that energy you use. DC power from either a solar setup and/or your vehicle alternator is going to be the most practical solution. You will find that if you are using say a BMPRO ProBoost40, it will provide up to 40 amps per hour to recharge your battery while driving. Travelling for only two hours or so each day will see your battery replenished from the car alternator and then you have the addition of solar power which will work through the same device. With the installation of 300W of panels (2 x 150W panels) roof mounted while camped you will again top up your batteries. With the right solar panels, you will likely be able to keep up your fridge consumption during the cooler parts of the day. Keep in mind your planned camping locations – if you traditionally seek out shaded spots, roof mounted solar panels will not be as good as portable panels which can be moved and directed towards the sun for maximum effect. Suggesting a 200Ah lithium battery setup will see you through your requirements for storage.

I trust this provides you with some of the basics to get your renovation underway and what to consider. Enjoy the project.

Safe travels,
12V Guru

Write to:
***Caravan World* Postbag,**
3 Wyman Place,
Braeside,
Victoria 3195

or email:
submissions@emprisegroup.com.au
Please include your full address (not for publication). Letters chosen will be edited for publication, may be shortened, and may appear online.

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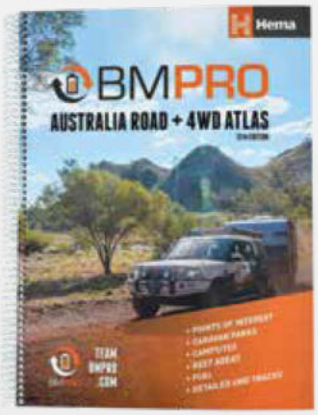
We are giving away a copy of the ***BMPRO Hema Road + 4WD Atlas*** valued at **$39.95**! This handy spiral-bound atlas features points of interest, caravan parks, campsites, rest areas, fuel and detailed 4WD tracks for your next trip. Just email your question to **David Bayliss** at **submissions@emprisegroup.com.au** with '12V Guru' in the subject line to be in the running to win.



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LETTER OF THE MONTH

WOOD HEATERS IN VAN

✉ I read an article you have online regarding fires in vans (very helpful information, by the way – thank you).

I'm wondering if you know if it's possible to have a wood fire/stove in a mobile home/van in Australia at all, please?

My online searches for information are not returning results that match what I'm seeking to find out (possibly my search parameters?). Any assistance or guidance you can give will be greatly appreciated.

Regards,
Nicholé

A *Hi Nicholé,*

Thanks for your interesting question and, as you have found, it's hard to get information about the subject.

While having a wood heater in a van might be a romantic idea, there would be plenty of reasons not to go down this path. I have not heard of wood heaters in mobile RVs in Australia, but I have seen blogs from England where travellers install mini wood heaters.

But the problems and safety issues seem to outweigh the ideal for a van that you take on the road.

Australian standards around all wood heaters address safety and pollution and there are strict rules around insulating the stove and the flue that would make installation difficult and would take an undue amount of space. For example, to protect occupants, the standards insist the flue has to be 4.6m above floor height, so in most vans it would protrude more that 2m above the van, which doesn't sound too practical.

Perhaps readers who have some experience around wood heaters in vans might share their experience.

Cheers,
John

ANNEXE ASSISTANCE

✉ Dear John,

We are recent caravan owners, having purchased a second hand, two-year-old MT14-S Prime Camper. We are still getting used to our van and have used it a few times, which we have enjoyed. Our problem is with the annexe. The original owners didn't use the annexe at all, it was still in the original bags when we bought the van, and they said it all came together as a package (premium package I believe).

We struggle putting it together and having it fit correctly. We have contacted Prime Campers and they don't seem to want to help us in anyway. There is no annexe plan for this caravan on any websites that we can get. Prime gave us the plan for the next size van up, but it isn't much help. My question to you is, do you know of anyone or a business that assists new van owners learning how to erect annexes in the correct way?

We subscribe to your magazine and love it. The information in your magazine makes us eager to get out in our great country and explore. Hope you can assist me with my enquiries. We live in Adelaide, SA.

Regards,
Keryn and Terry Clark

A *Hi Keryn and Terry,*

I reached out to Prime Campers and they seem happy to help. They suggest you contact Corey at Prime Campers Adelaide on coreys@primecampers.com.au and he will sort things for you.

Let me know how you go.

Cheers,
John

UNDER PRESSURE

✉ Hi John,

Regarding connecting to water at caravan parks – should I have a pressure limiting valve installed or is it okay to just check the pressure at the tap and reduce the pressure if required to a reasonable level?

Thanks,
Noel Crouch

A *Hi Noel,*

Your van should come with a pressure limiting valve from new. If it's an older van and for some reason the valve has been removed, then yes you should fit one.

Regards,
John

UHF NOT VHF

✉ Hi John,

I have been a subscriber to *Caravan World* for some years and am also currently planning to travel to WA.

On reading your 'First Words' I note you intend fitting a VHF radio (30-300MHz) for local communication. I presume you are actually installing a UHF radio or, alternatively, I am curious as with whom you will be communicating.

I am installing both UHF and HF in my vehicle for my travels.

Maybe see you on my travels.

Regards,
Phil Newman

A *Phil,*

You are right, of course. I seem to have been all at sea when I wrote that. VHF is generally a marine radio. For those I confused, UHF will get you local access on land and is great for communicating with trucks or in convoy. HF is generally for remote communication over long distances and requires specialised equipment and a licence. Many consider UHF a must have for anyone towing a van over long distances, *because communication with trucks is ultra important. At some stage you will need to let a truck past and it's important the manoeuvre is done safely. Thanks Phil for picking up my error.*

Regards,
John

BATTERY STORAGE REGS

✉ Hi John,

After reading the last few months' reviews of several of the new caravans you have done, I am quite bewildered by the amount of these new caravans that do not meet the new electrical standards introduced in December 2022, with particular regard to battery storage regulations that state that they must be stored in a "non-inhabitable area".

Many of these caravans that have been reviewed have photos still showing batteries stored under the double/queen beds or under the seats!

So, my question is:

Are the caravan manufacturers really making any serious efforts to move to/meet these new standards during the grace period when they continue to store the batteries within the habitable areas in these new builds?

I suggest you need to highlight this as part of the reviews for readers and in particular prospective buyers.

Regards,
Martin Brown

A *Martin,*

Thanks for your letter. The regulations come into force at the end of 2023, giving manufacturers time to make the changes.

The external storage will need to be tested as robust and safe and wiring looms will need to be changed so it might not be a simple task when manufacturers are snowed under and perhaps short of parts needed. The new regulations make sense for AGM batteries and will bring an added level of confidence to owners.

Have fun,
John

TIME TO CHANGE WATER FILTER?

✉ Hi John,

I have a question about my B.E.S.T. water filter. I've had my filter for nine years and I have no idea as to the amount of litres that have gone through it. It says it has no time limit and is good for 5000 litres. We go away every Christmas and Easter, as well as long weekends throughout the year. Is it time to change?

They're really a great filter and I sing its praises to many people at caravan parks and show them just how dirty caravan park water can be by backwashing the B.E.S.T. filter and seeing the brown water come flying out!

Thanks,
M. Appleby

A *Hi M. Appleby,*

I approached Colin from B.E.S.T. Water Filters and he advises that it's probably best to replace the filter after ten years but it's easy to test the effectiveness of the filter by a taste test. The filter will remove any chlorinated taste and if there is still a chlorinated remainder then the carbon filtration has lost its effectiveness.

Colin suggests anyone with queries around the filter should contact him on 1800 240 822.

Regards,
John

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How to win

☛ If you're stumped by a technical or towing problem, send your question to **submissions@emprisegroup.com.au** with 'Tech Talk' in the subject line or send a letter to *Caravan World* Tech Talk, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside, Vic 3195. All entries must include your full address (not for publication).

TRAVEL HAPPY

We shine the spotlight on caravanners, their rigs, and their travel tales

SEND PICS TO WIN

While heading to the NT last year in his Windsor Rapid and 2020 Pajero tow vehicle, Scott Papeneux pulled off the road 50km north of Port Augusta and stayed the night in the vicinity of one of the old road/rail gang camps.
"We were only 20m from the rail line. The first train came past just before dusk, and we got a big toot from the driver. There were another six trains overnight and we like to think one of them may have been The Ghan."

Graeme and Gaye Edwards sent in this photo while parked up for the night at the peaceful serene cliffside rest stop between Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing, WA, returning from a wonderful trip to The Bungles, Kununurra and El Questro.
"We love the rugged wild beauty of the Kimberley. Our van is the very comfortable and tough New Age Manta Ray 19 ER Lux towed by 2020 VX 200 LandCruiser."

Leanne and Neville Binns of Queensland are on Big Lap number five.
"This time with our new 2022 XLT Ford V6 Next Gen Ranger and our 2017 Millard 17ft 6in Etoura. We try to take different roads each time. Our photo was taken in Wirrabara, in The Remarkables district, South Australia."

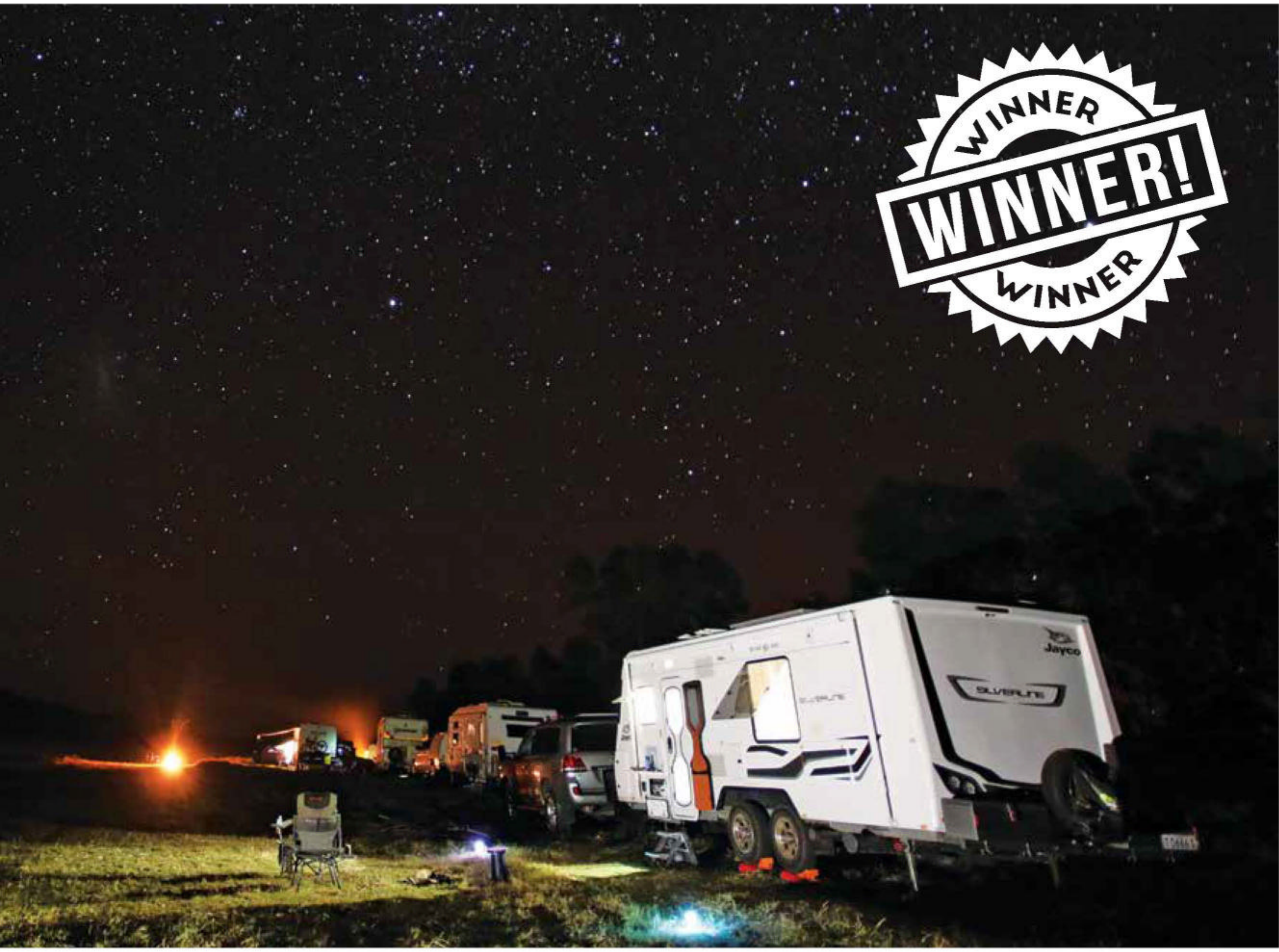
Mike and Renee Garrett enjoyed the beautiful sunset sky while free camping next to Lake Lonsdale, Vic, in their small Goldstream van and Nissan Patrol.

WIN!

This month's winner will receive a Purple Line Saracen Ultra Hitch Lock valued at $189. Saracen Ultra is a highly visible, compact, high security lock which works both hitched and unhitched to keep would-be caravan thieves at bay. It fits to most standard 50mm ball hitches on caravans, camper trailers, boat and car trailers, and even work trailers. **For more information about this and a host of other vanning accessories, visit purpleline.com.au**

Michael and Verity Bland set up camp at Corella Dam, halfway between Cloncurry and Mount Isa, Qld, on their 12-month hiatus.

"Our trusty rig, a 2010 200 Series LandCruiser with 337k on the clock and still going strong, pulling a fantastic 2016 Jayco Silverline 21.65-3 tourer. Beautiful nights, stunning stars, just breathtaking."



HOW TO WIN

☛ Just email your most travel-inspiring picture (2-3Mb) of yourself, family, or friends with your rig along with a brief description to submissions@emprisegroup.com.au with 'Readers' Rigs' in the subject line, or send a print to Caravan World Readers' Rigs, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside VIC 3195. All entries must include your full postal address (not for publication). Photo submissions may also appear on *Caravan World* socials and caravanworld.com.au

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CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW COTY 2023 assembly area; The beautiful Yarra Valley; Lovely winding roads

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CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023
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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF COTY

Words *Amelia Mansell*
Pics *Ian Bellert and Amelia Mansell*

MAJESTIC
MAJESTIC

As the glorious days of autumn rolled into Victoria's beautiful Yarra Valley, so too did an exciting lineup of caravans — all of them ready for their chance to shine at Caravan of the Year 2023 presented by MSA 4x4 Accessories. But before we get into the testing, we'll take a peek behind the curtain of this five-day event, and all the people that contribute to making it happen.

Caravan of the Year 2023 presented by MSA 4x4 Accessories returned with all pistons firing this year – the sheer determination of every manufacturer was clearly visible, with some of the best of our local industry proudly on display. This year's competition attracted 12 vans from 10 manufacturers, all vying for the ultimate title of 'Caravan of the Year' under the close consideration of our judges.

The Big4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park in Healesville was the proud host of COTY 2023, and our four judges, photographers and organisers rested comfortably in the park's modern cabins and glamping tents, surrounded by the lush Yarra Valley surrounds.

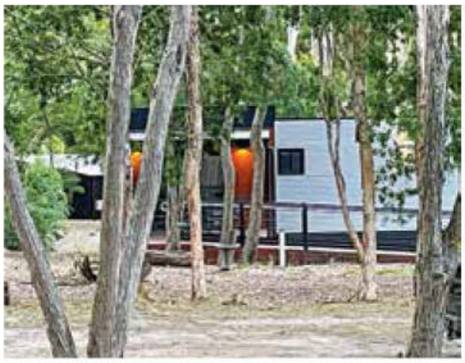
This is where the magic happened – from the judges casting their eyes and strict criteria over the line-up of vans to the entire COTY team all playing their integral parts in bringing the event together.

Over the course of the five-day event, the judges reviewed each caravan carefully, both on ground and in a varied terrain tow test, inspecting everything from the build, design and accessories to how they handled on the road. All to help understand the unique qualities and experiences each van offers the market.

WHAT COTY IS ALL ABOUT

At its heart, the main purpose of COTY is to provide experienced and objective assessments of the caravans on display. When asked about the importance of the event, Emprise Group Chief Executive Officer, Rob Gallagher, said: "We believe that the Caravan of the Year event is a vital part of Caravan World's charter to help consumers find the best products for their touring adventure, through credible and authoritative testing.

"This year, like the competitions before them, credit must go to the manufacturers who present their vans for testing. Not everyone can win, but the fact they are willing to put their products through the rigorous testing process is testament to their confidence in their brand and their product.



THE POWER OF
REDARC

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Tim Chilvers from Redarc at the event dinner; Beautiful spot for filming; Glamping; Groovy accommodation; Celso and Dominic had a great time

"It is also important to acknowledge and thank our loyal sponsors including presenting partner MSA 4x4 Accessories, Redarc and A247. These partners and our dedicated team provided great support to the many programs needed to run an event of this size and without their help, activities such as the Showcase Day would not have enjoyed such heightened success."

Returning for a second year, MSA 4x4 Accessories was proud to be the major sponsor of the entire event. A respected household name within the 4WD industry, MSA 4x4's innovative products include the Drop Slide, SEMA award winning towing mirrors, the original Water Bra and an extensive range of 4WD accessories available throughout Australia.

Other sponsors included Redarc, which hosted a wonderful dinner on the Friday night for the COTY team as well as the entrants, and A247 which sponsored the well-attended public Showcase Day on the Saturday.

"There is a mountain of preparation and organisation that goes into each of these annual events"

MEETING UP WITH THE TEAM

There is a mountain of preparation and organisation that goes into each of these annual events, and when I had the chance to join in on the action during the final day of judging, you can be sure I jumped at the opportunity.

Arriving at Big4 Park Lane, I enjoyed a self-guided driving tour through the park, appreciating the beauty of the site, including the fun renovated tram carriage that greets you at the entrance and the newly constructed modern cabins. After meandering my way through the park, I located the spot where the COTY team had set up their domain for the five-day event.

Sleek, picture-ready caravans were parked on the grass with a backdrop of beautiful, towering trees. While all was serenely quiet, it wasn't long before the team rolled up in convoy, returning from their latest round of tow-testing and photography.

The names of the four judges will not be unfamiliar to many readers. Malcolm Street, John Ford and Tim van Duyl are all COTY veterans, each having participated as judges in the 2022 event and at prior Best Aussie Vans (as COTY was previously known), and their astounding level of knowledge and expertise cannot be disputed. The newcomer to the scene this year was *Caravan World* Deputy Editor, Allison Watt. A journalist by trade who cut her teeth in suburban newspapers in Melbourne's western suburbs before the days of the internet, Allison spent 25 years in corporate communications and other roles in the local government sector before returning to her writing roots in 2022.

"When our son was very young, my partner and I pledged to give him a childhood full of travelling adventures and memories," Allison said. "We purchased our first Jayco Swan camper 18 years ago and have been caravanning to all corners of the country ever since in various iterations of makes and models. We absolutely love caravanning – it's the best way to explore those fascinating and sometimes forgotten little pockets of Australia and it's a great education for kids.

"Our son is now an adult so we have purchased our first 'couples' van and can't wait to do a lot more exploring. We are very excited about joining this year's migration north and escaping the Melbourne winter.

"I was very excited to be a judge at this year's COTY and I was blown away at the quality of the entries – caravans have certainly come a long way in a very short space of time."

Meeting up with the team, they were all quick to share how impressed they had been by the standard of vans, and how each year the manufacturers are raising the bar even higher.

"Caravan of the Year 2023 presented by MSA 4x4 Accessories was a ripper and not only in terms of location and the people involved but also in the vans entered in this year's event. The level of build quality and professionalism shown by the brand preps has been increasing year on year, but it feels like the industry took a massive leap forward in 2023," said *Carvan World* Creative Director and COTY judge, Tim van Duyl.

HIGHLINE CARAVANS
HIGHLINE CARAVANS

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Allison getting ready for a video review of a van; As an event coordinator and judge, Tim kept everything on track; John having a chat with Vlad from Highline Caravans; Mal and Allison enjoying a well-deserved break between reviews

HIGHLINE
CARAVANS
Kinsman
HIGHLINE
01T028J

ABOVE AND BELOW Heading out onto the drive loop; A lot is involved in the judging process – including being the talent for some of the photography

> *"The four judges score the vans according to nine cirteria* and provide their comments and feedback on those categories"

ACTION STATIONS

So began my crash course on all the different activities that were tackled during a day at COTY, and first up there was one of the last few caravans to put to the test.

Listening to the judges review a van, I was quick to see how each of their skills, expertise and background brought a unique perspective to the process and aided in creating a comprehensive and objective review of each van.

Tim, *Caravan World* Creative Director and COTY organiser, was quick to ask the big questions, targeting everything from the size of the fridge and how the water tanks were configured, to querying the warranty's stance on beach travel.

Editor-at-Large John Ford is a regular caravan guru, took in all the details and hit home with his questions and savvy insight every time.

Meanwhile, despite the damp terrain, Malcolm was quick to get down and take a look at the underside of the chassis and pull out his measuring tape and camera to record and check all the specs.

Allison, who only recently underwent the process of buying her latest caravan, was in her element when it came to pointing out any practical elements of liveability.

THE REVIEWING PROCESS

Comparing the vans is no easy task, for while all entrants are the cream of the crop, they are by no means the same kind of caravans and cannot be judged as like for like.

For almost a decade, the vans have been judged on the same nine categories seen throughout *Caravan World* reviews, covering all the realistic areas of a van that can be reviewed.

With each criterion, the judges take into account the van's intended purpose, which could be anything from extreme offroading to blacktop touring, and consider it not only against similar COTY entrants but also against vans of a similar class available on the market.

The four judges score the vans according to the nine criteria and provide their comments and feedback on those categories, as visible in the following reviews.

Value for Money

In this category, the judges consider the van's overall cost and balance this against what the van offers in terms of features, quality, durability and overall experience compared to similar vans.

Towability

After taking the van out for a test drive the judges assess how the van performed on the road, its weight and feel when driving and what kind of tow vehicle is necessary.

Suitability for Intended Touring

This criterion takes into account the van's intended target market, and how it fulfills the needs and requirements those prospective buyers are expecting. For example, if it is marked as an extreme offroad van, does it have the power, solar and water capacities to stay offroad for an extended period and is the build up to the task?

Build Quality

Build quality is somewhat self-explanatory. Here the judges look at the construction of the van from the ground up, looking at the chassis, body, interior and more and keeping an eye out for anything that might impress or be cause for concern.

Liveability

When it comes to liveability, the judges look at the practicality of the van for its intended purpose. This includes if the layout is both functional and comfortable, the available storage and appliances.

Customer Care

This criterion refers to any warranty and after-sale care the van manufacturer offers to buyers and compares these to others within the market.

Self-Sufficiency

The judges consider how self-sufficient the van is for its intended purpose, considering water, power, solar and gas capacities, as well as the ensuite and cooking facilities.

Innovation

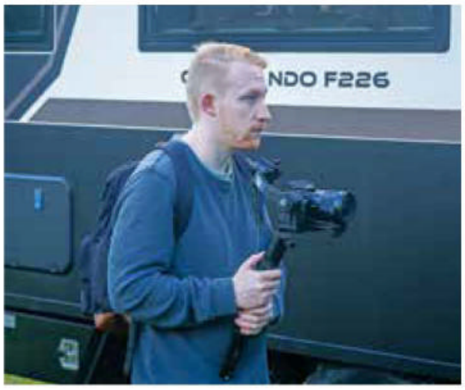
When it comes to innovation, the judges assess how the manufacturers have brought something different or new to the van. This might be the construction methodology, a unique design feature or van layout. Innovation is a broad consideration, looking at everything from solving problems, increasing efficiency to exciting changes in interior design or aesthetic that have not been seen on the market before.

X-Factor

In this category, the judges consider what makes the van stand out in its class – what is most impressive and will give potential buyers that 'wow' moment. This could be anything from a bold exterior design to the inclusion of a specific accessory or feature, and how well these inclusions were executed.

HIGHLINE CARAVANS

ABOVE TO BELOW The judges kept working - rain, mist or sun; Tim's piece to camera; Judges at work



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Josh Robinson returning to his trusty Sony camera; Cam Inniss and Phil Cerbu had their routine down to a fine art; Josh Hanger always at the ready; A lot goes into the photography at COTY

PICTURE PERFECT

For the second half of the day, I split away from our judges and joined one of the talented photographer and videographer teams, Cam Inniss and Phil Cerbu, as they hit the road with a manufacturer and van entrant in tow. When flicking through the pages of *Caravan World*, it's easy to appreciate a terrific action shot, but seeing it in person was even more impressive. Cam and Phil had gotten their routine down to a fine art by the time I joined them, with our car and the manufacturer's using a two-way radio to smoothly leapfrog each other up and down the winding road through the Yarra Valley. Cam and Phil pulled over at memorised safe spots to perfectly capture the van as it was driven around the chosen picturesque corner, before parking safely to do it all again.

Among the rolling hills of the Yarra Valley, Punt Road Wines was kind enough to let us use its driveway as a backdrop. It was here I got to first watch Cam in his element, drone in hand as he captured some of the footage that goes into each van's review video that can be viewed online (youtube.com/c/caravanworldmagazine).

Cam and Phil were only a couple of the many photographers and videographers that were working nonstop throughout the week alongside our judges and organisers, and after seeing what goes into it – whether it was patiently waiting for a curious local to get out of the shot or jumping into the bushes for a perfect angle – my hats off to the entire team for their work.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

It was a great experience at the end of the Friday to join all the manufacturers, photographers and videographers as they travelled in convoy along the picturesque Black Spur between Healesville and Marysville for the event dinner sponsored by Redarc. It was a great night for all the people involved in COTY to have a chance to kickback and share their experiences of how the event had gone.

The manufacturers are based in various locations across Australia, with some, such as Wonderland making the pleasant trip over from Melbourne for the duration of the event, while others had completed the hard drive down from Queensland.

"It's been a really good experience so far –

"The Yarra Valley, with its stunningly lush natural surrounds, *was the perfect location for this year's COTY event*"

KOKODA
STRENGTH • PASSION • PRIDE
COMMANDO F226

ABOVE AND RIGHT Judging in the mist – a family affair; We shared the Big 4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park with a Westpac cycling team there for a fundraising ride

COTY is not something we've done before, so thank you," said Ethan from My Dream RV, a new manufacturer on the caravan market.

But it was not over yet. One of the main highlights every year is the public Showcase Day, which gives the prospective buyers the opportunity to get up close and personal with that year's caravans and the manufacturers that created them. Held at Don Road Recreation Reserve in Healesville, blue skies and cool weather prevailed, and the day was a resounding success for all.

A247, which sponsored the Showcase, had a fantastic stand that drew a lot of attention throughout the day, featuring a wide range of brands including Cgear, Mukmat, Navigator, Barebones and Tembo Tusk.

And the locals also had the exciting opportunity to see the INEOS Grenadier in person – an exciting new SUV that has sold more than 1000 units without even being launched in Australia yet. For more information on this tow vehicle, check out Tim's first drive at the INEOS global launch in Scotland (*Caravan World* issue 633).

The Yarra Valley, with its stunningly lush natural surrounds, was the perfect location for this year's COTY event. And a big thanks to everyone involved, the judges, photographers, writers, organisers, sponsors and contestants, for all helping ensure this year's COTY was such a resounding and special event.

ElecTreX CARAVANS
spinifexcaravans.com.au
Spinifex CARAVANS
ElecTreX PREMIER
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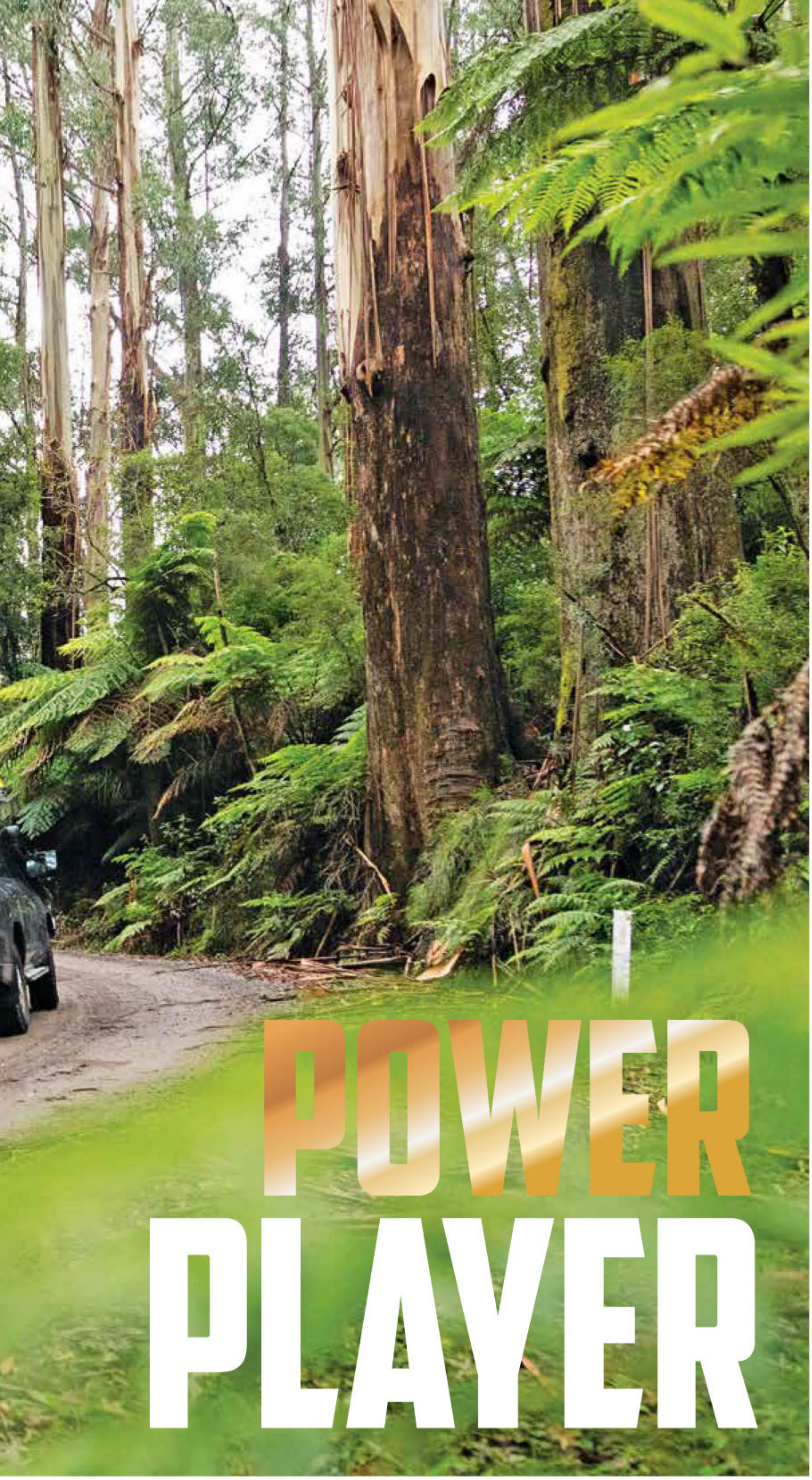
SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO



POWER PLAYER

CARAVAN WORLD ★ presents

CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

Sponsored by

MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES

Overall Winner

★★★

Winner

VALUE FOR MONEY

BUILD QUALITY

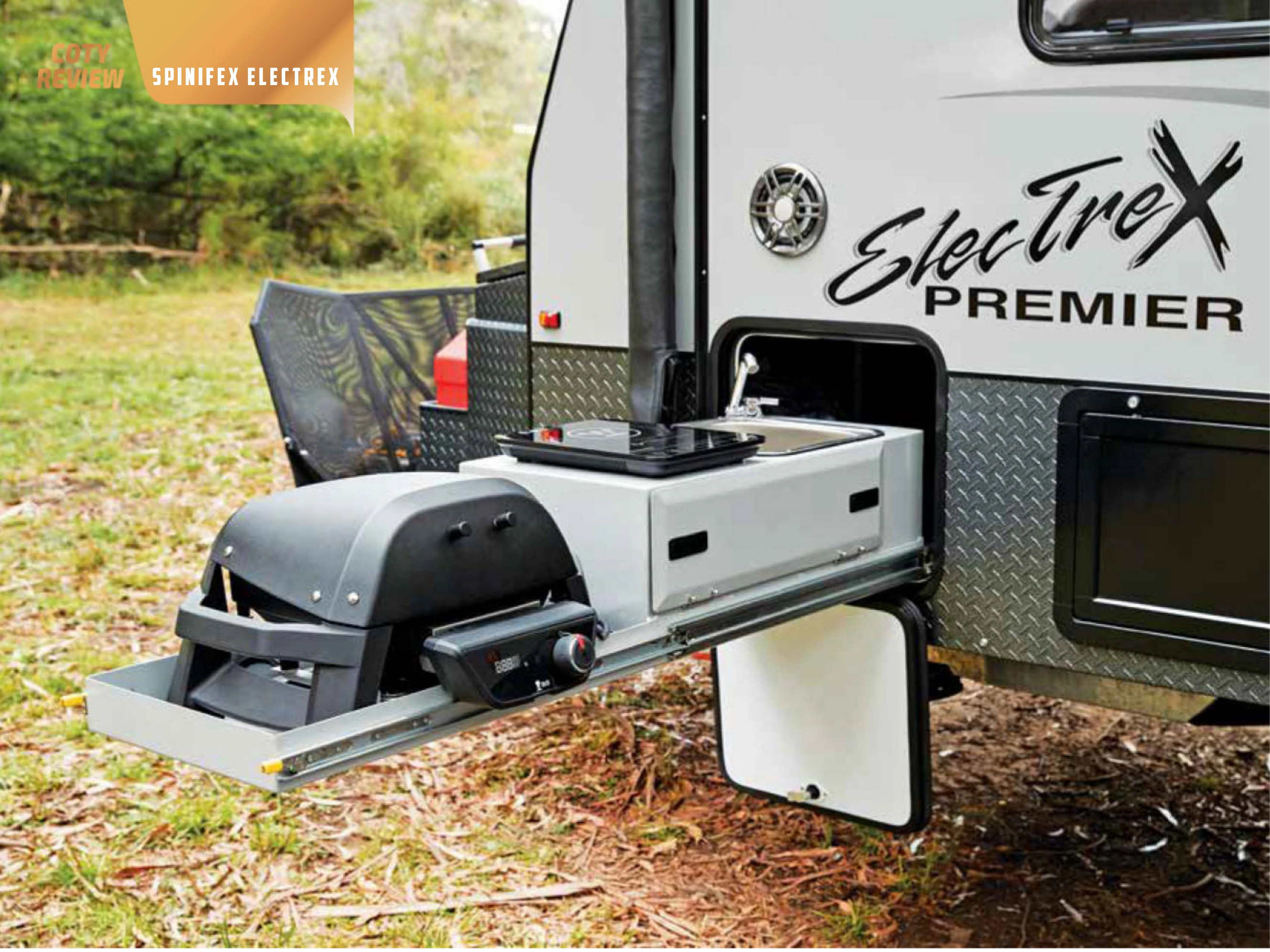
Equal Winner

X-FACTOR

★★★

The all-electric Electrex from Spinifex lives up to its name – there is no gas and a massive power supply which gives this classy offroader remarkable self-sufficiency.

Words COTY Judges
Pics Graeme Neander and Phil Cerbu



ABOVE The exterior slide-out kitchen is where most of the cooking will happen

Spinifex Caravans is one of the big guns to come out of Queensland, producing serious, extreme offroad, all terrain caravans that are custom built in the true sense of the word.

Spinifex's mission is to deliver the best offroad caravans in Australia and they come at a price – Spinifex was among the four manufacturers at this year's awards with an entry priced at over the $200,000 mark, but that's what you should expect to pay for a fully customised offroader with remarkable off-grid self-sufficiency.

The Electrex Premier is a gasless van. While other entrants make the same claim, the Spinifex has no gas fitted whatsoever – the barbecue is electric, water is heated by diesel.

But while the Spinifex Electrex is designed to go bush for extended periods, you won't be roughing it. The fixtures and fittings are high quality – we're talking leather lounges, inside and outside kitchens, a queen-sized bamboo pocket spring, pillow top mattress and built-in Foxtel.

Let's see what the judges had to say.

ALLISON WATT
CARAVAN WORLD DEPUTY EDITOR

The Spinifex is an extreme offroad, all terrain caravan designed to go off-grid and stay there almost indefinitely.

There is no gas fitted so the Electrex is true to its name. The power supply is massive, from the OzXcorp DCX 14.3W lithium battery mounted underneath in a fireproof, waterproof and crushproof box, 5000W inverter/charger and 1720W of high-voltage, commercial solar power. This system has enough solar-generated power to run domestic appliances effectively for days.

So out in the bush in the middle of summer you can sleep with the air conditioning running all night, wake up in the morning, flick on the kettle and pop some bread in the toaster – these creature comforts of home are not a problem for the Spinifex.

The Pulse electric Weber barbecue and induction cooktops both inside and outside take care of the cooking requirements and diesel is used for heating and hot water. Add to that 440L of water capacity – and a pump to draw water from a nearby river or creek – and 230L of fridge space and you'll be comfortable in the harshest of Aussie environments.

Spinifex
CARAVANS

CARAVAN presents
CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023
Sponsored by MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES
Overall Winner
★★★
Winner
VALUE FOR MONEY
BUILD QUALITY
Equal Winner
X-FACTOR
★★★

Spinifex is not a cookie-cutter manufacturer by any stretch. Every van is custom built and not just the colour of the upholstery and cabinetry. Spinifex works closely with every owner to ensure that every minute detail meets their individual needs, which is why the company only produces four vans each month at its Deception Bay headquarters.

The van we judged this year belongs to Spinifex Managing Director Steve and his wife Elise, and there won't be another like it out there. Everything about it reflects their individual needs and Elise's tasteful style. The interior is a standout – matt black cabinetry and waterfall benchtops, light wood panel walls, black Italian leather lounges and the absence of high cupboards over the bed and in the bathroom to create a spacious feel.

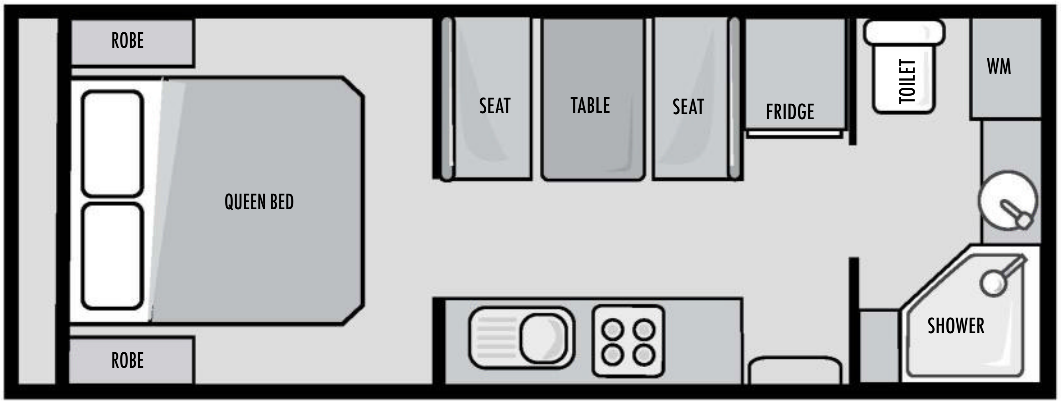
The appliances are also next level. The wall-mounted 3kg front loader NCE washing machine in the bathroom is also a dryer and there is a handy built-in dirty clothes cabinet underneath. A lot of cooking is done on the outside barbecue and slide-out kitchen, but inside there is a 45L oven which is a microwave, grill top and bottom and an air fryer, all in one.

Another simple innovation that I really liked was the bin mounted on inside of the entry door which is a great use of otherwise unused space.

ABOVE AND LEFT A neat drawbar setup; The bin mounted on the inside of the door was a nice innovative touch

INNOVATION ★

"The van we judged this year belongs to Spinifex Managing Director Steve and his wife Elise, and there won't be another like it out there. *Everything about it reflects their individual needs and Elise's tasteful style"*



RIGHT The Electrex is ready to go bush for extended periods, but you certainly won't be roughing it

SPINIFEX
ELECTREX PREMIER

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Overall length 8.68m (28ft 6in)
External body length 6.02m (19ft 9in)
External body width 2.45m (8ft)
Travel height 3.1m (10ft 2in)
Internal height 1.98m (6ft 5in)
Tare 2940kg
ATM 3500kg – up to 4500kg
Payload 560kg (calculated)
Ball weight 240kg

EXTERNAL
Structure Frame Aluminium interlocking U-channel
Cladding Core matt fibreglass (4mm thickness)
Chassis Hot dip, galvanised steel
Suspension Cruisemaster XT 4500 Airbag with disc brakes
Coupling Cruisemaster DO45
Brakes 12in disc brake
Wheels BFG KO2 all-terrain tyres
Water 360L freshwater, 80L drinking water, 80L grey water
Battery DCX 14kW lithium at 51V
Solar 1720W
Air-conditioner Webasto top trail Ct24
Gas None
Sway control None

INTERNAL
Cooking Induction
Fridge Bushman DC230
Microwave Convection 27L
Bathroom Rear separate ensuite
Washing machine 3kg front loader NCE washer/dryer
Hot water Truma Combi D6 water/air heater

PRICE FROM $207,000

OPTIONS FITTED
- Premium leather
- Slide-out kitchen
- Generator 2.2kVA

PRICE AS SHOWN $215,000

MORE INFORMATION
Spinifex Caravans
P: (07) 3888 2221
E: sales@spinifexcaravans.com.au
W: www.spinifexcaravans.com.au

CARAVAN ★ presents

CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

Sponsored by

MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES

Overall Winner

★★★

Winner
VALUE FOR MONEY
BUILD QUALITY
Equal Winner
X-FACTOR

★★★

RIGHT AND BELOW From its chassis to the body construction and interior, the Electrex's build quality win was well deserved; Power is no concern in this all-electric van

TIM VAN DUYL
CARAVAN WORLD CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Firstly, can I just say well done to Steve, Elise and the Spinifex team for taking out Caravan of the Year 2023 presented by MSA 4x4 Accessories. This was Spinifex's first foray in an event like this and although I had high expectations from what I knew of the brand, the Electrex still wowed and in a big way. Well done, everyone, on the overall win and on taking out Best Build Quality along the way.

Its name says it all – Electrex. This is a caravan built with the intention of creating a haven where power is never a concern and by using the OzXCorp DCX system, there is little to think about in terms of how it goes together or operates too.

With up to 4000W of solar input and enough panels on the roof (1720W for this van), it has the capacity to run AC without discharging from the batteries (it will still run through them so don't go unplugging your battery bank!) and its 51.1 nominal voltage means it does not require heavy gauge wiring to bring enough power to appliances like 12 and 24V can. But what stands out is how it is packaged by the specialist RV-electronics builder.

DCX comes as modules that can be slung between chassis cross-members with relatively simple connections to solar, house appliances, their 7kW or 14kW (as seen here) battery banks and external power supplies. The simplicity of the system is a positive as it allows for simpler (lower cost) installation and easier support, should there be any required across its astonishing five-year warranty.

With 440L of freshwater capacity,

BUILD QUALITY ★

"We've only scratched the surface of how impressive the build quality of the Electrex was at Caravan of the Year 2023, the detail goes on"

CARAVAN presents
CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023
Sponsored by MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES

Overall Winner

★★★

Winner
VALUE FOR MONEY
BUILD QUALITY
Equal Winner
X-FACTOR

★★★

including the 80L drinking water tank, a frugal couple should see up to 10 days before needing to hit emergency jerry can supplies or refilling of the tanks. Be more liberal with water and 440L should still see in the region of seven days' comfortable living. It should be noted that the 80L grey tank won't hold all of what comes out so you might want to run a hose from the shower when not in national parks.

Rivetting the body frame was a considered decision and one I see the logic in. As big boxes on wheels, caravans need some flex and rivets allow just enough to reduce stress points in the frames but without the danger of rot like wooden frames can succumb to. Between the frame and 4mm Corematt fibreglass skin is cut to measure insulation which should reduce heat-soak from the dark exterior of the van.

The cabinetry is outstanding with notched main joins and the use of quality hinges and handles. As you would expect of a van of its calibre, the appliances are all equally high end like the Bushman 12V fridge, Westinghouse induction cooker and Truma Combi D6 diesel water and space heater.

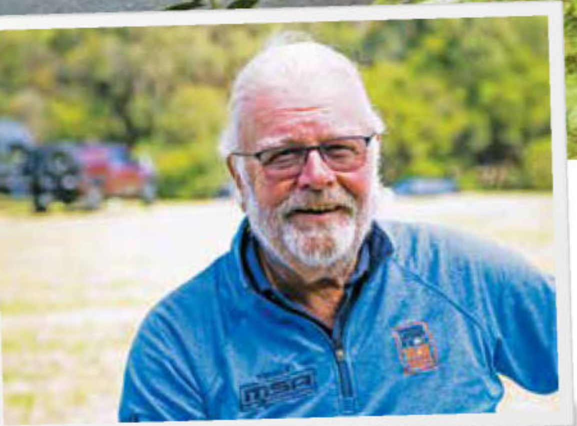
The use of disc brakes on the Cruisemaster XT air suspension is as good as it gets. The chassis is a work of art made in-house by Spinifex, the finish is exquisite and being hot-dip galvanised, durable.

We've only scratched the surface of how impressive the build quality of the Electrex was at Caravan of the Year 2023, the detail goes on. Deservedly, the Electrex came through as the caravan with the highest score in this critical criteria; the Spinifex Electrex is the 2023 winner of Best Build Quality.

Spinifex has now built over 550 vans and I'd hazard to guess more than half have been bought on the recommendation of an existing customer. The team's work is as good as it gets and the small company's focus on having all customers be part of a Spinifex family suggests they get it right. There is a dedicated warranty officer that we heard was as much employed to help customers better understand and use their vans as they are to support actual faults, further reinforcing that the company stands by its product and owners, even if the three-year manufacturer's warranty is less than some of its main rivals.

Spinifex
CARAVANS

ABOVE The Electrex towed well, but an upgraded tow vehicle is a must



TOWABILITY ★

"I can't pretend we didn't notice the van hitched up behind, ***but there was more than sufficient power to get us over our steep mountain course***"

JOHN FORD *EDITOR-AT-LARGE*

Wow. A few vans claimed heavy-duty payload capacity at this year's event, but Spinifex came prepared to prove the point. The Electrex on show is the company owner's van. It was loaded with a few months' travel paraphernalia, including a tow vehicle with a 3.5m tinny on the roof rack and a 15hp engine at the toolbox. Their 200 Series LandCruiser has a GVM upgrade to cope with an all-up weight of somewhere around 4000kg.

I can't pretend we didn't notice the van hitched up behind, but there was more than sufficient power to get us over our steep mountain course. Handling was exemplary, with no pitch, sway or pushing us around from the heavy load. The disc brakes did their bit to bring us to a halt when we tried them at the sharp corners on the steep descent. The Spinifex is over 8m long and 3m high, so care is needed in the bushy bits, as I found when I misjudged a tight corner and had to have a second go. Tare weight is nearly 3T, and most versions will be at least 4T ATM, so you need an upgraded tow vehicle. A Prado isn't going to cut it, and neither will any of the twin cab utes, so consider this when picking your combination.

As we have seen, the van is a unique build for the company owners, so the layout and furniture are a one-off design. This highlights that Spinifex is a custom builder, and it's unlikely that any of their hundreds of vans on the road are the same. A big part of living in a van for months at a time is how the van feels. How the colours blend. How easy it is to move around, and so on. The immediate impact on stepping aboard is a real eye-opener. The perfectly rendered interior is a pleasant surprise for a go (nearly) anywhere van.

A powerful electronics package gives almost unlimited 240V power for a range of household appliances and this makes a big difference to how you live on the road. You can cook on an electric barbeque or induction cooktop, boil a jug without lighting gas and run the air-con.

Even entertainment options change. Hook up to Foxtel and watch your favourite sport or drama on a big screen smart TV or pump out as much sound as you like. I could get used to that.

CARAVAN ★ presents

CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

Sponsored by MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES

Overall Winner

★★★

Winner

VALUE FOR MONEY

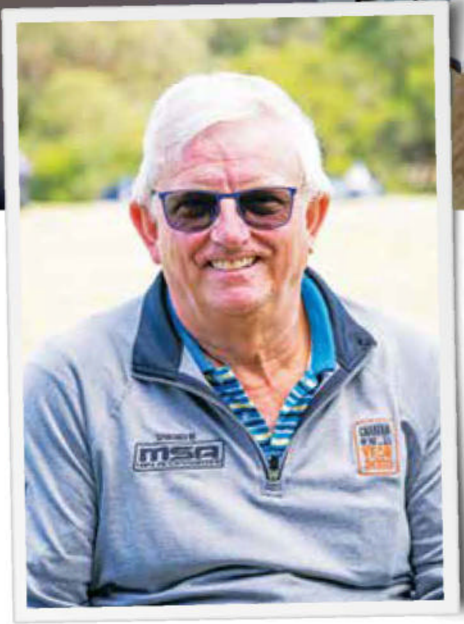
BUILD QUALITY

Equal Winner

X-FACTOR

★★★

ABOVE The interior custom-made kitchen features drawers designed to fit appliances



VALUE FOR MONEY ★

> "The Electrex Premier was designed as a caravan capable of *serious offroad travel and with all the comforts of home built in*"

MALCOLM STREET

CARAVAN WORLD FIELD EDITOR

A price tag of $208,000 certainly puts the Electrex Premier into the expensive category, especially when a heavy-duty tow vehicle is also thrown into the equation. A problem exacerbated by rising costs in just about any industry you care to name. However, the Electrex Premier was not built with price in mind, well not much. It was designed as a caravan capable of serious offroad travel and with all the comforts of home built in.

Since 2007, Spinifex has steadily built a reputation for building custom offroad caravans, an area where the van's features are equally as important as the price. That might sound like needing an open-ended budget, but it is more like choosing the most desirable features rather than a 'take it or leave it' approach. Since this caravan was built for the boss, it naturally has the best of everything, but it also has everything that has been 'tried and tested'.

Some of the finer things in the world of caravanning are certainly the X-Factor on the Premier. Starting with the 14.3kW/hr OzXcorp DCX system, a huge battery capacity by anyone's standards. It's designed to run the air-conditioner, kettle and toaster all day. It operates at 51V DC to achieve that, which means far less operating current, less cable size and less efficiency losses. A little differently, the solar panels are like those used on houses, again for efficiency reasons but it does mean the electrics need to be worked on by a licensed person.

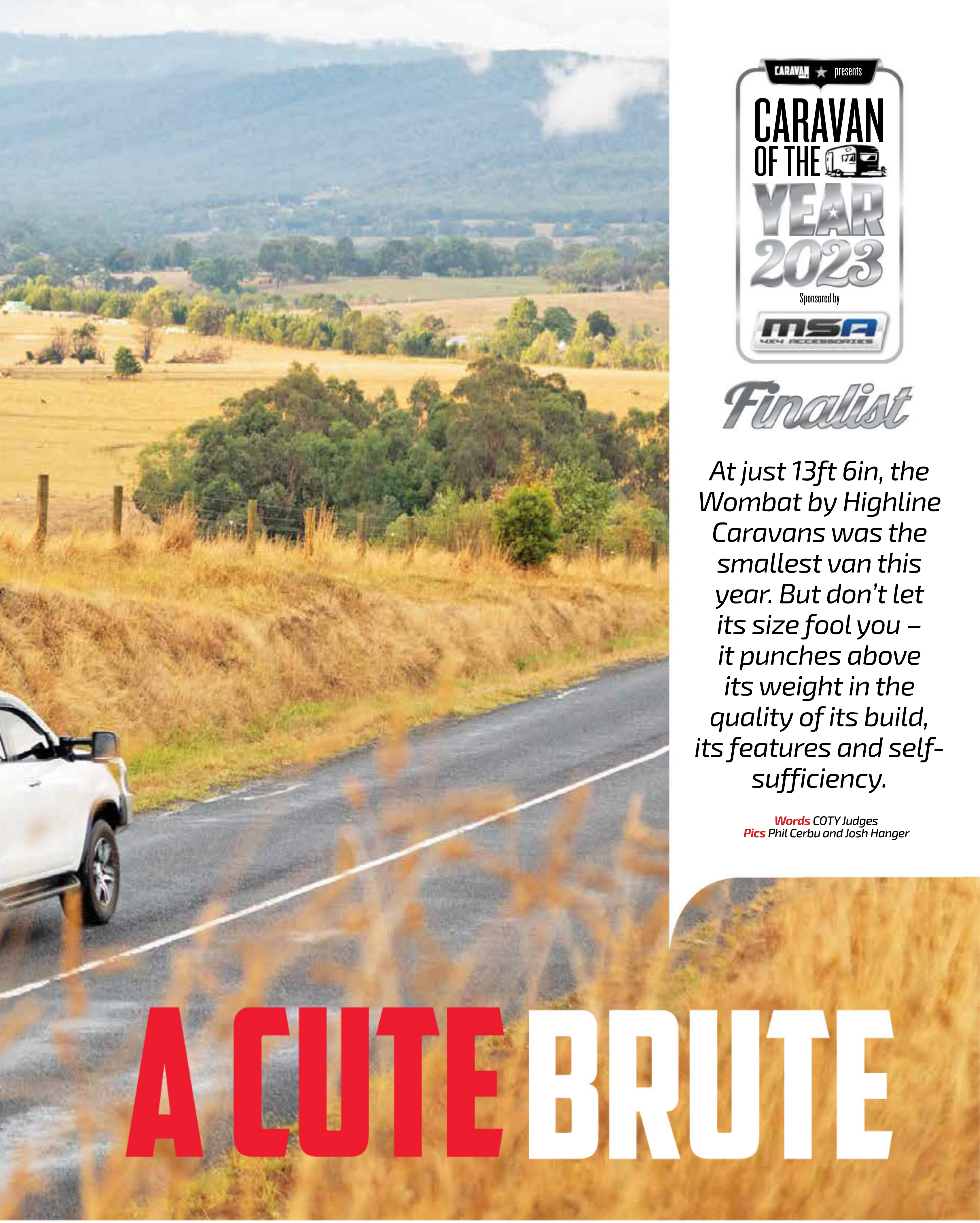
The Premier does have a generator optioned in as an upgrade but, unsurprisingly, it has had little use! What gets more use is the slide-out kitchen with a Weber Pulse electric barbecue. Instead of being manufactured from stainless steel, the slide-out's framework is all aluminium.

Disc brakes are a little unusual in the caravanning world, but the Elextrex Premier has them fitted to the 17in alloy wheels, along with the Cruisemaster air bag suspension. Less obvious but still effective items include the narrow shelving that's built into the outside of the bathroom wall. It makes a very practical, easy-to-access pantry adjacent to the kitchen. Also, the custom-made kitchen drawers that are designed to fit appliances. Above the entry door are two raisable aerials, one for AM/FM radio and the other for boosting a 4G signal.

From the outside, the Premier is a deceptive van. In some ways, it looks like a few other caravans in the offroad category, but getting under the skin reveals a very purpose-built van worthy of further investigation.

GREE
HIGHLINE
WOMBAT

SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO



CARAVAN presents

CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

Sponsored by MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES

Finalist

A CUTE BRUTE

At just 13ft 6in, the Wombat by Highline Caravans was the smallest van this year. But don't let its size fool you – it punches above its weight in the quality of its build, its features and self-sufficiency.

Words COTY Judges
Pics Phil Cerbu and Josh Hanger

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The Wombat isn't lacking anything inside; The eye-catching decals really stand out; Slide-out exterior barbecue; Checkerplate storage box up front

ALLISON WATT
CARAVAN WORLD DEPUTY EDITOR

This small, single axle, fully offroad caravan is new to the Highline range, and has all the creature comforts you'll need to go off-grid in a light, manoeuvrable package that is easy to tow with a mainstream SUV or dual cab ute and will easily get into the tightest spots whether in a caravan park or down a bush track.

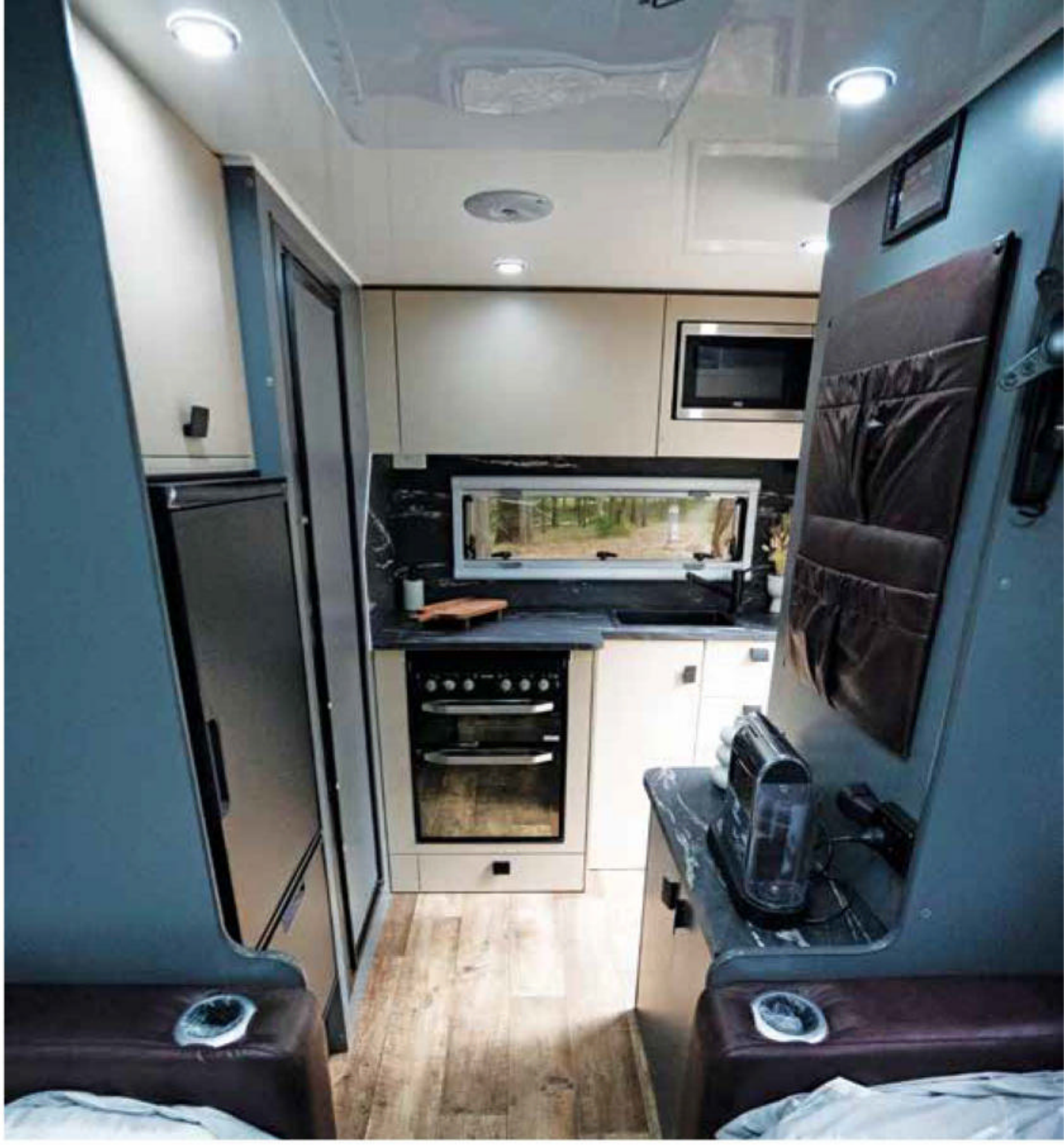
The Wombat may be tiny but it's packed with features so $80,000 is good value for money – particularly for those looking to make the step up from a camper trailer to a full caravan and a few more creature comforts.

At 13ft 6in, this single axle, fully offroad twins singles van has everything you need to stay off-grid for a few days at a time, including gas, solar panels, lithium batteries and a generous amount of water-carrying capacity for its size. It's not lacking anything inside either – combination bathroom, full oven, air conditioning and heating, compressor fridge and microwave.

The icing on the cake for the Wombat is that you won't need a big tug to pull it around so if you already own a family SUV or dual cab ute, you're right to go.

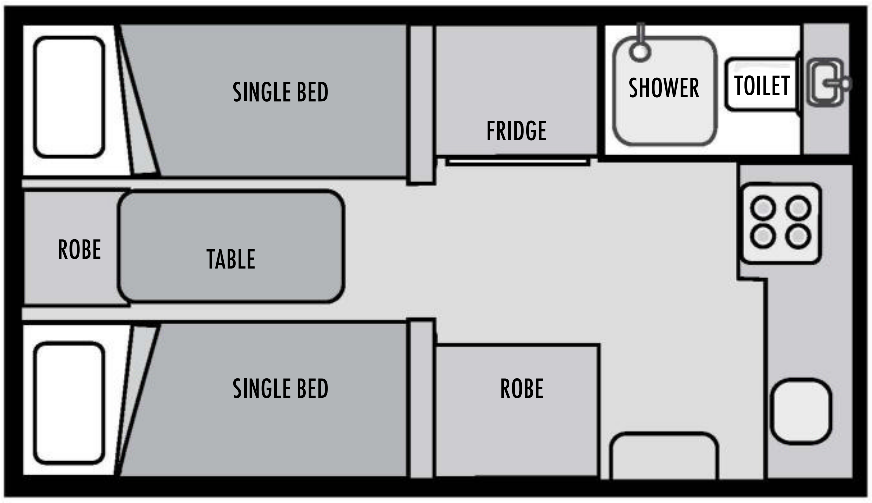
Among the behemoths competing at this year's awards, the cute, compact size of the Wombat with its eye-catching decals really stood out. It's a functional and fun little package that will appeal to a lot of caravanners because of its manageable size and easy towability, without requiring a huge vehicle.

It is reminiscent of the simpler little bondwood vans of the 1950s and '60s but with a whole lot of 21st century technology. The Wombat is new to Highline's range – and I suspect it will be a popular one.



VALUE FOR MONEY ★

"The icing on the cake for the Wombat is that you won't need a big tug to pull it around, so if you already own a family SUV or dual cab ute, you're right to go"



WOMBAT
HIGHLINE CARAVANS

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WOMBAT
.COM.AU

RIGHT At 13ft 6in, you won't need a big tug to pull this fun, compact van

HIGHLINE CARAVANS

HIGHLINE
WOMBAT

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Body length 4.15m (13ft 6in)
Overall length 6m (16ft 6in)
External body width 2.3m (7ft 5in)
Travel height 3.2m (10ft 4in)
Internal height 1.94m (6ft 3in)
Tare 1980kg
ATM 2800kg
Payload 820kg (calculated)
Ball weight 140kg

EXTERNAL
Structure CNC lightweight timber walls
Cladding PROBOND composite panels
Chassis Intelligent Engineering
Suspension 2.8T TuffRide independent suspension
Coupling DO35
Brakes 12in AL-KO
Wheels 265/75 R16
Water 2 x 95L freshwater, 1 x 110L grey water
Battery 2 x 110Ah lithium
Solar 2 x 210W
Air-conditioner Gree
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control N/A

INTERNAL
Cooking 3 gas/1 electric full oven and grill cooktop
Fridge Thetford compressor 174L
Microwave NCE 23L flatbed
Bathroom Shower/toilet combo
Washing machine N/A
Hot water Fogatti hot water

PRICE FROM $79,990

MORE INFORMATION
Highline Caravans
P: (03) 9357 9092
E: info@highlinecaravans.com.au
W: www.highlinecaravans.com.au

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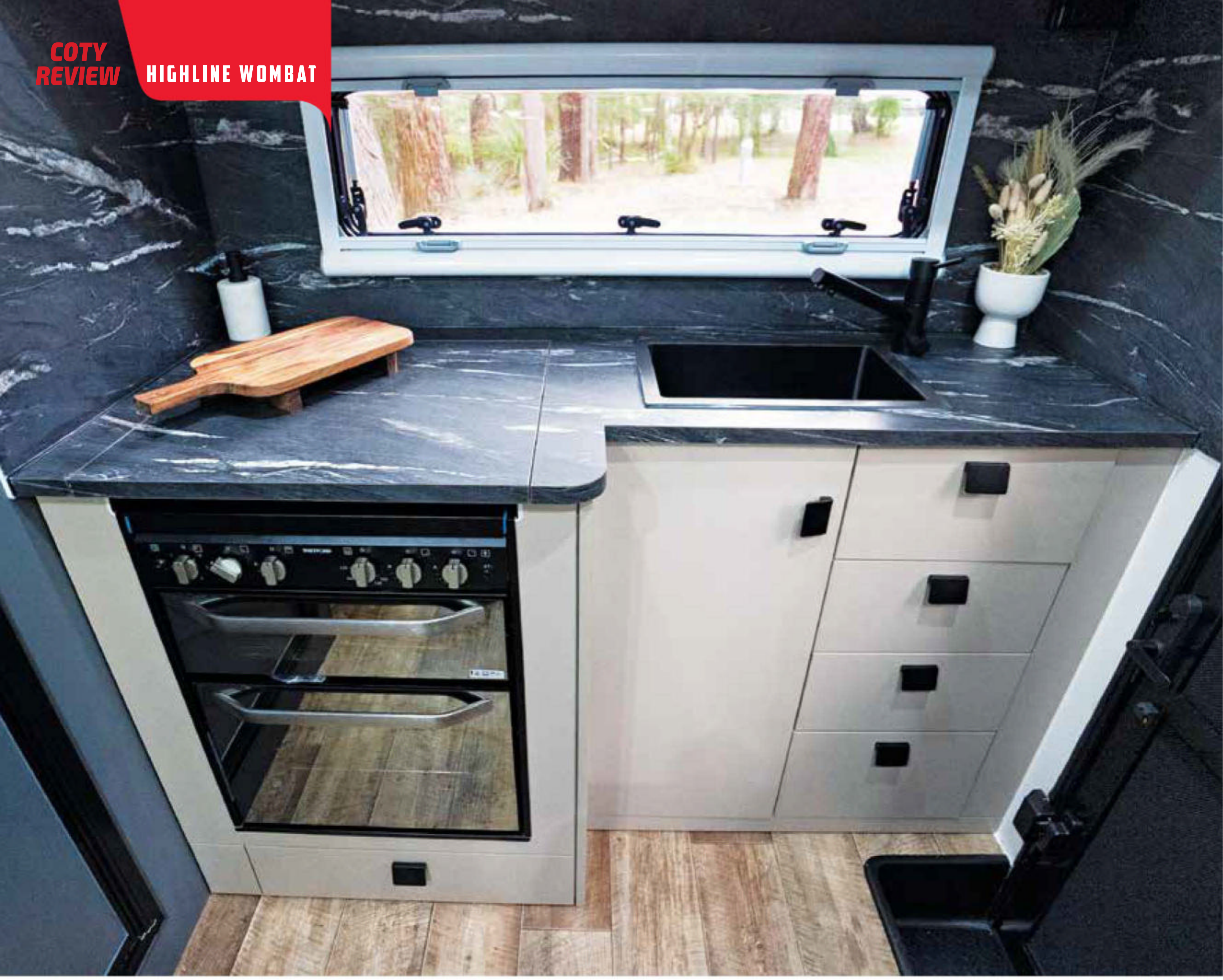
WOMBAT
HIGHLINE CARAVANS



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A compact internal kitchen; 2.8T TuffRide independent suspension; A robust build; This compact van is adventure ready

TIM VAN DUYL

CARAVAN WORLD CREATIVE DIRECTOR

I am a big fan of doing a lot with less. Sometimes that means repurposing things around our home or using a packing crate as a seat when car-boot camping. I also like it when designers manage to do more with less space and that's exactly what stood out about the Wombat for me. It's a 13ft van that has the build to go outback and the specs to stay there. It is a van that will embarrass a lot of larger vans on specs and capability. Plus, how fitting is the name for such a cute brute of a caravan!

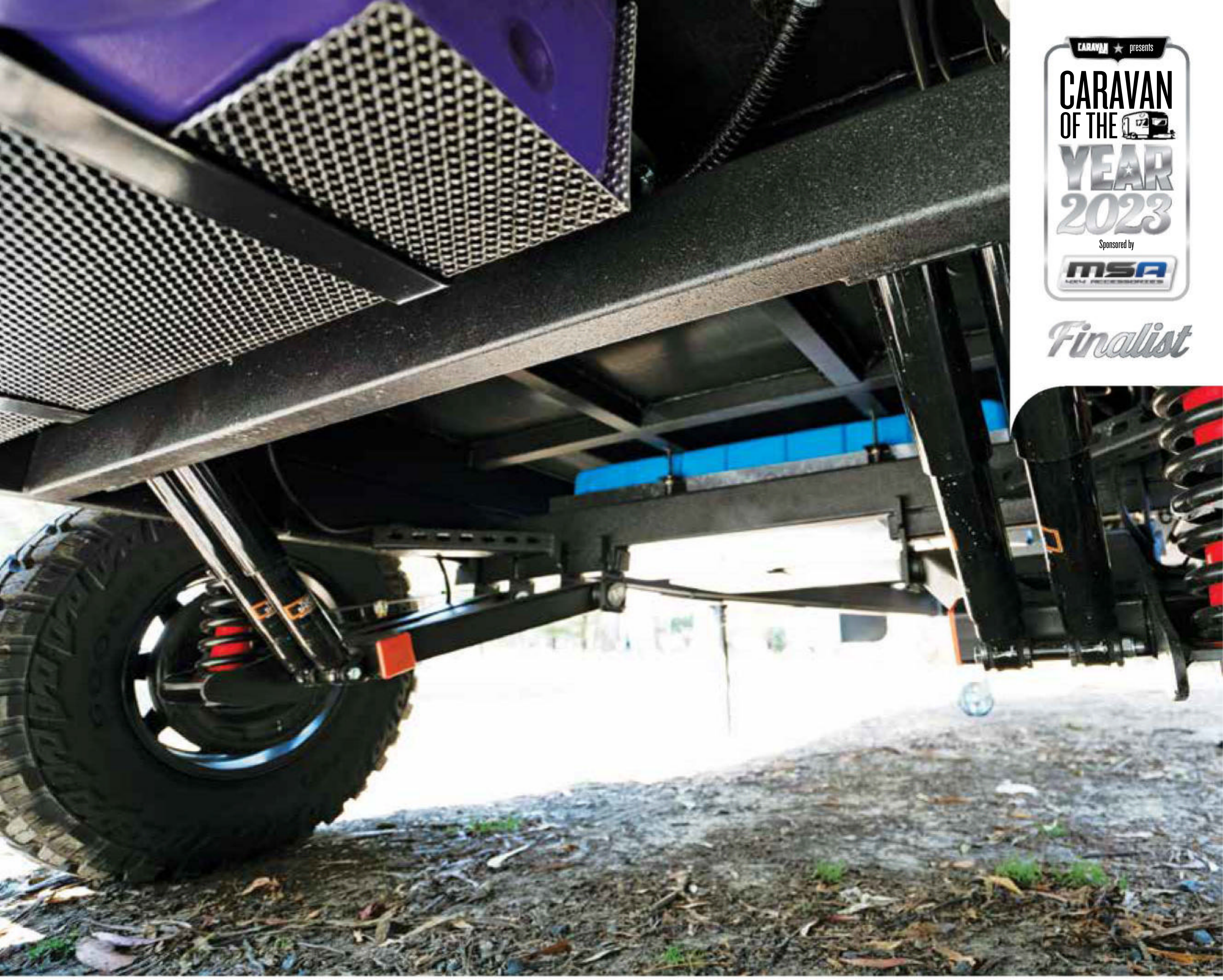
One look inside and it's clear who this van is for – couples who want separate beds. Looking beyond what will be a definitive 'yes' or 'not for me' layout and the Wombat has a lot going for it that no doubt translates into the east-west alternative layout if you still fancy a cuddle.

The Wombat's good ground clearance, decent water for two and enough power production and storage should have people that want a week in the bush without the burden of a big van in tow looking. With 190L of freshwater, a couple should see five days of considered use and with 420W of solar fed into 220Ah of lithium, unless you're in a truly shady spot, it should run the 174L Thetford fridge and LED lights indefinitely.

Couple that with the single axle and light-by-modern-standards 2800kg ATM and this is a van to take remote.

Highline recently included options to have your van built with a CNC, notched ply wall system that I rate. It's used by other top-quality brands as it allows for some needed flex in the body while also offering good insulation from sound, cold and heat.

It's easy to forget it's also only 13 feet long. It's tiny compared to a lot of what we see coming out these days yet packs a lot of off-grid capacity, a great – really great – chassis and suspension set up into what is about as small of a caravan as you can fit a shower-over-toilet, small kitchen and decent bed into.



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SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING ★

"The Wombat's good ground clearance, decent water for two and enough power production and storage should have people that want a week in the bush without the burden of a big van in tow looking"

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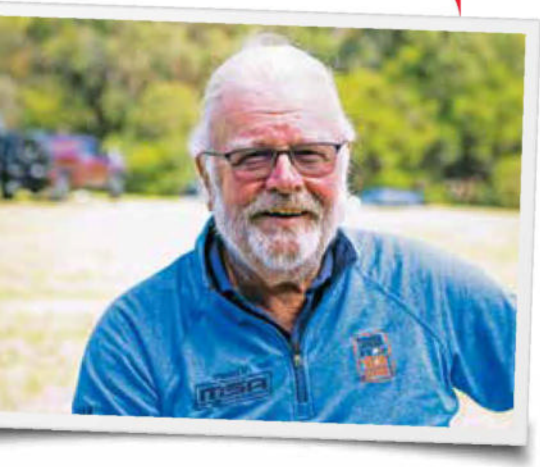
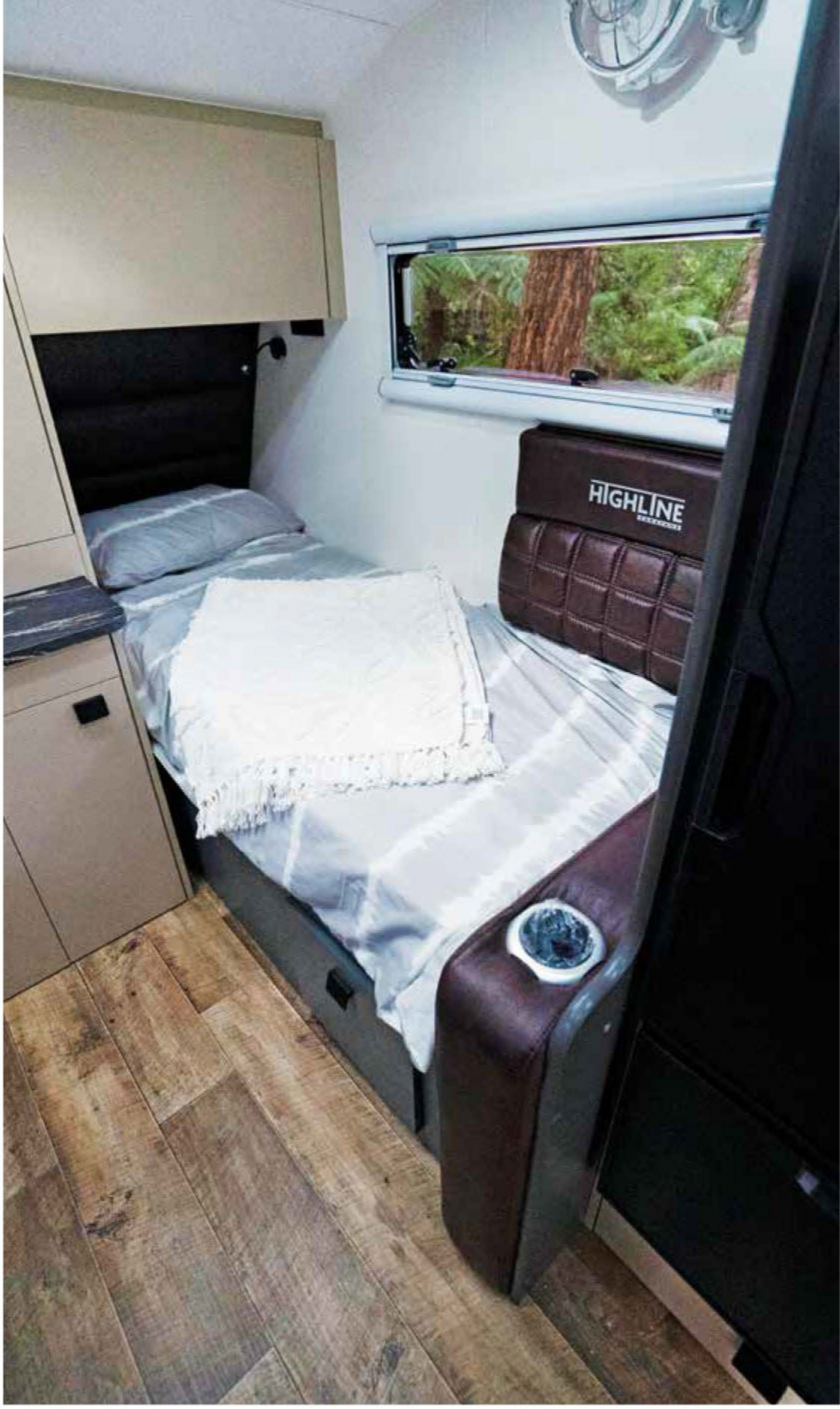


JOHN FORD *EDITOR-AT-LARGE*

With only 13ft 6in to play with, the Wombat is limited in surface area on the roof, but Highline manages twin 210W of solar up top and 220Ah of power in two chassis-mounted lithium batteries. An Anderson plug is ready for a mobile solar panel to help top up the system. While this isn't a vast amount of electrical supply, it's decent for a couple in this style of van, and the gas supply will take care of cooking and heating needs. So, too, while the water isn't capacious with twin 95L fresh tanks, it's as big as you could expect and it's enough with careful use to stay off-grid for a week or so. The 174L of cool storage is generous in a van this size, so you won't lack for fresh food or a cold drink. The 110L grey tank means national parks aren't off the agenda, so the little Wombat will be perfect by a creek somewhere, spending a week or so without having to worry too much about saving water for showers.

Highline has been on an upward curve of build quality since its beginning 10 years ago. It recently switched to the marine ply CNC cut jigsaw wall construction employed by some high-end caravan builders. The construction method offers a more robust build and separates Highline from the Melbourne pack of traditionally built vans. The Wombat is clad with composite aluminium for improved weather protection and durability over the old-style ribbed panels. Appliances are all quality items, doors and windows are upmarket additions from Aussie Traveller and the furniture looks strong and well-finished with quality runners and hinges.

The chassis, body and furniture are all covered for three years, and the standard warranty applies to appliances. There are five dealers across the country and a dedicated staff member handling any problems at the factory. The Highline website has some handy customer care advice and lists the items that should be addressed at a regular service.



ABOVE The single bed layout is practical in a van this size, and the retro-looking armrests

BUILD QUALITY ★

"The construction method offers a more robust build and separates Highline from the Melbourne pack of traditionally built vans"

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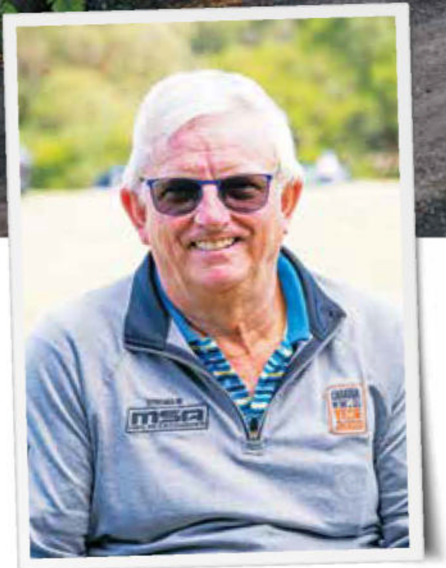
ABOVE The Toyota Fortuner was a good match for towing the compact Wombat

TOWABILITY ★

> "For this year's COTY, Highline can make the claim that it brought the smallest caravan to the event … on the road, the Wombat was very docile behind the Fortuner with very little snatching and jerking. ***It was a pleasure to tow***"



MALCOLM STREET
CARAVAN WORLD FIELD EDITOR

Highline Caravans is like many caravan manufacturers based in Campbellfield, Victoria – a company that produces a range of caravans to suit every need and budget. For this year's COTY, Highline can make the claim that it brought the smallest caravan to the event. The single-axle Wombat has an external length of just 4.15m (13ft 6in) and it certainly looked like a baby among some of the other contenders. Size isn't everything, though, and the Wombat has a tare mass of 1980kg and an ATM of 2800kg. While that means a payload of 820kg, a maximum loaded weight under 2500kg is possible with a bit of careful loading.

Consequently, a Toyota Fortuner, with its maximum tow rating of 3200kg, is a good match for towing the Wombat. In addition, it has a combined length of 10.5m (34ft), which is very handy for drivers who either don't like large rigs or have limited parking. On the road, the Wombat was very docile behind the Fortuner with very little snatching and jerking. It was a pleasure to tow.

There's only minimal space inside the Wombat, being a small van, but what there is has been used quite effectively. Our COTY rear door entry van came with single beds up front. The alternative is an east-west bed, but single beds are more practical in a caravan this size, especially as it means an extra cupboard can be fitted between the beds. The rear half of the van is taken up by a shower/toilet in the offside corner and a kitchen bench that fills the rest of the wall. That leaves the remaining space for an offside Thetford 174L fridge and a nearside wardrobe. Everything – kitchen, bathroom and bedroom area – is very compact.

That's the beauty of this van. It might look small but for a couple who mainly desire a simple interior and don't have the budget for a large tow vehicle, then it's a winner. I liked the rather unique feature of the retro-looking armrests at the base of both beds; they are a neat touch. Another eye-catcher was the wardrobe. Not just a space to hang some clothes but three different cupboards with two doors facing the rear and a third facing into the van. All with shelves of various sizes. Very space efficient. Similar to the drawers under the beds. Given the size of the internal kitchen, the slide-out exterior barbecue is a welcome addition and one that keeps cooking smells outside. While that takes some of the tunnel storage, there's also a checkerplate storage box outside.

In keeping with the Wombat's length, everything is downsized one way or another but it's an example of great things coming in small packages.

TITAN CARAVANS
SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

CARAVAN ★ presents

CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

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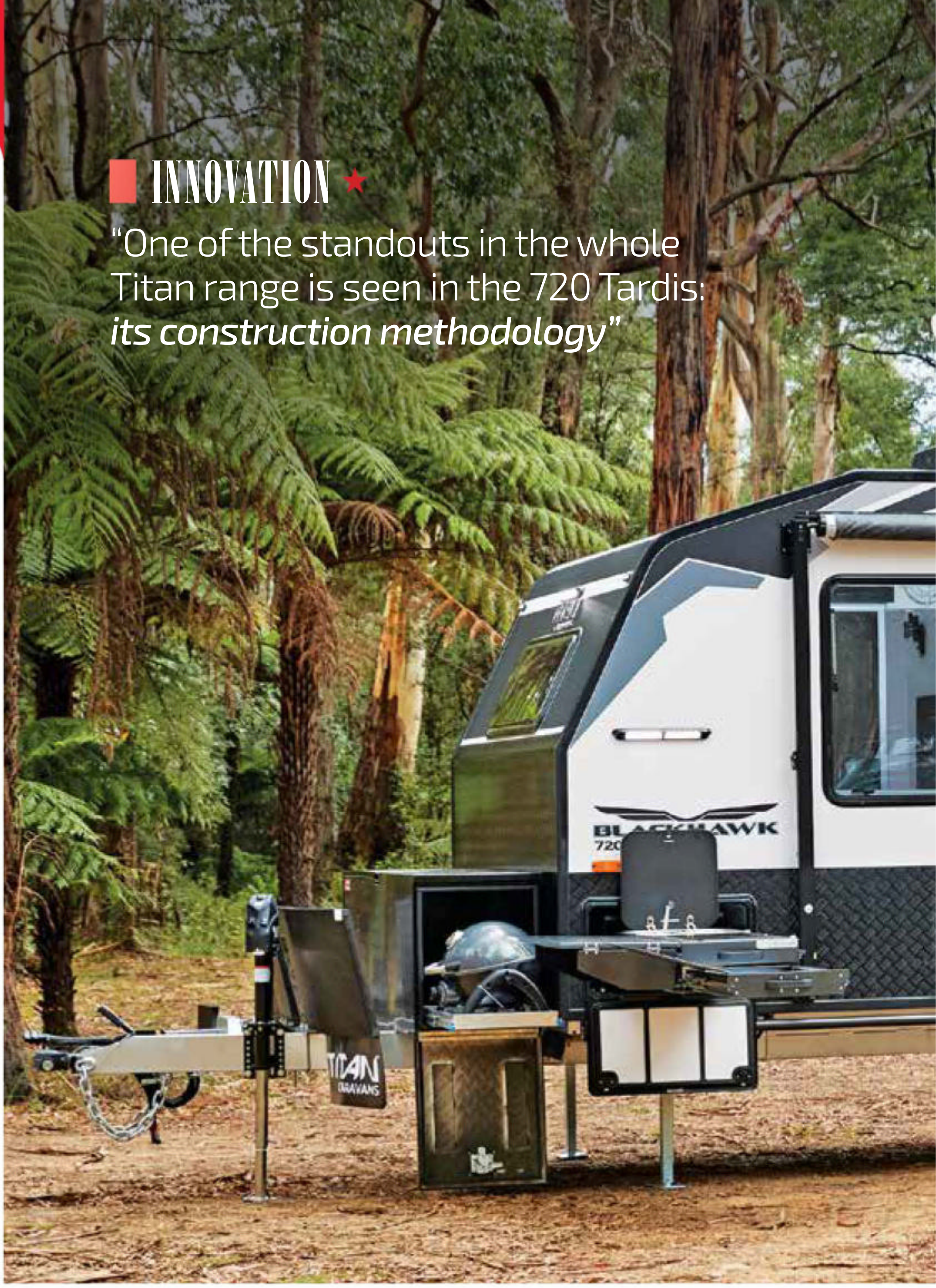
A MACHINE FOR OUR TIME

Tardis is used to describe surprisingly spacious accommodation, so the name of Titan's 23ft luxury van makes perfect sense.

Words *COTY Judges*
Pics *Phil Cerbu and Graeme Neander*

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The Tardis is perfect for a slow lap off the beaten track; The drawbar storage box includes a slide-out barbecue; Enjoy outdoor living with the Tardis

TIM VAN DUYL
CARAVAN WORLD CREATIVE DIRECTOR



INNOVATION

"One of the standouts in the whole Titan range is seen in the 720 Tardis: *its construction methodology*"

Last year, in our first taste of Titan Caravans at Caravan of the Year, the 480 and 490 blew us away. This year was always going to be more of a challenge, with a larger lineup of brands joining the week-long shootout.

Did Titan come away with massive success again? No. But did it hold its head high? You betcha. Armed with a 720 Tardis and 575 Blackhawk built to the same standards as last year's winners but with more space and more inclusions, the Titans certainly held up to their name as heavyweights with plenty of punch where it matters.

The 720 Tardis is the biggest van in the current range, but it still packed more in than you could expect looking at its sleek exterior. At 23ft, it has the length to be able to run a rear club lounge, centre, split bathroom and front bedroom.

I love this layout as it has the space needed for a gang to play cards at the table, the room to dry off easily behind the closed doors of the ensuite and a bedroom that you can fully seal off from the noise down the back.

It also has an impressive volume of power creation and storage capacity with 800W of solar and 600A of lithium battery, that's enough to not worry about it in cooler climates or to allow for a few hours of daily runtime of the AC in the hotter parts of summer. It also has a decent volume of water capacity with enough (285L fresh, 95L grey) to last 7-10 days, more if you consider using the jerry cans.

The 720 Tardis might not look like an extreme offroader and it's not. It is warrantied for offroad work and I think it will be right at home touring the Flinders or staying long periods on farm stays outback, but it is not the van for pushing the limits of speed on unmarked tracks. This is a van for the slow lap off the beaten track and I think it's near perfect for it.

TITAN CARAVANS

One of the standouts in the whole Titan range is seen in the 720 Tardis: its construction methodology. Using sandwich panel construction is not necessarily innovative these days but the style of the panel is. The team uses a panel that is bonded and then baked to ensure it properly binds together. With more than a thousand vans now on the road in Australia alone, not to mention those in NZ, the reports are that it is durable and living up to its strong warranty too.

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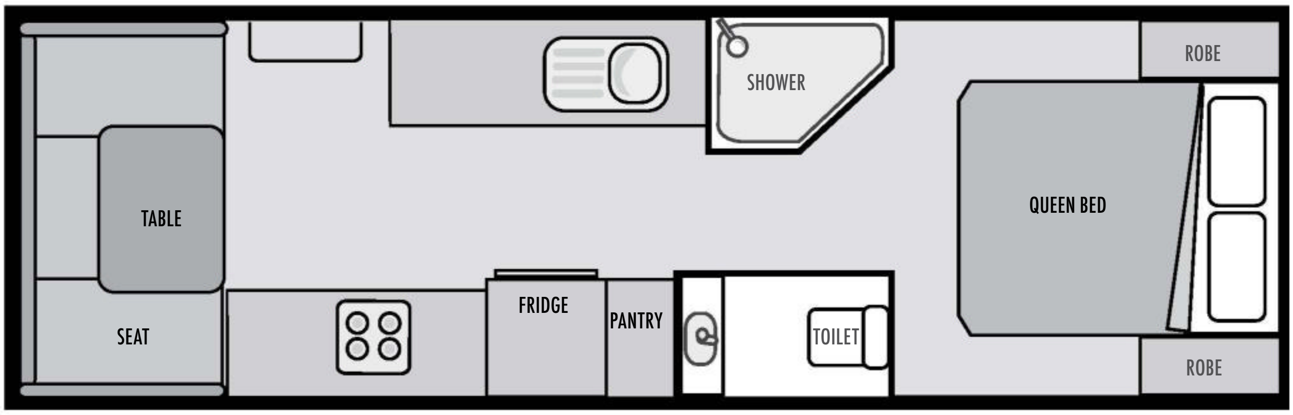
SHOWER
ROBE
TABLE
QUEEN BED
SEAT
FRIDGE
PANTRY
TOILET
ROBE

TITAN
BLACKHAWK 720 TARDIS

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Overall length 9.4m (30ft 10in)
External body length 7.2m (23ft 7in)
External body width 2.3m (7ft 6in)
Travel height 3.1m (10ft 2in)
Internal height 2m (6ft 6in)
Tare 3063kg
ATM 4000kg
Payload 937kg
Ball weight 305kg

EXTERNAL

Structure XPS closed cell structural foam and aluminium sub frame
Cladding Gel coat fibreglass
Chassis 6in galvanised chassis
Suspension AL-KO ENDURO X
Coupling DO45
Brakes AL-KO 12in offroad
Wheels 16in alloy wheels
Water 3 x 95L freshwater tanks, 1 x 95L grey water tank
Battery 3 x Victorn 200Ah, 1 x Victorn 3000W MultiPlus II Invertor Charger (MultiTouch 70 Display)
Solar 4 x 200W Solar
Air-conditioner Truma Aventa
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control BMPRO Sway Control

INTERNAL

Cooking Thetford 353 Combo Gas 3-hob
Fridge Dometic Compressor (Smart Fridge)
Microwave Camec
Bathroom Centre ensuite
Washing machine 3.2kg Fresca
Hot water Truma combi heater

PRICE FROM $129,990

OPTIONS FITTED

- Stage 3 off-grid package
- Gripsport bike rack
- SatKing Pro Satellite
- BushTucker custom induction slide-out kitchen

PRICE AS SHOWN $149,990

MORE INFORMATION

Titan Caravans
P: 07 3216 4555
E: sales@titancaravans.com.au
W: www.titancaravans.com.au

RIGHT The kitchen is huge with workable areas on both sides and quality appliances

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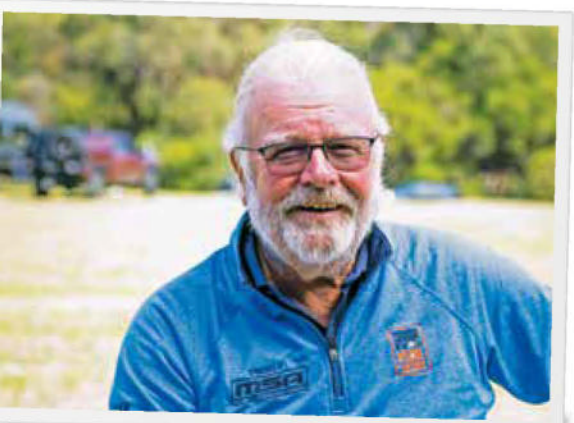
CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW The front bedroom is spacious and comfortable; AL-KO suspension; Slide-out kitchen with induction hob and sink; Vitron lithium batteries; BushTucker gas bottles



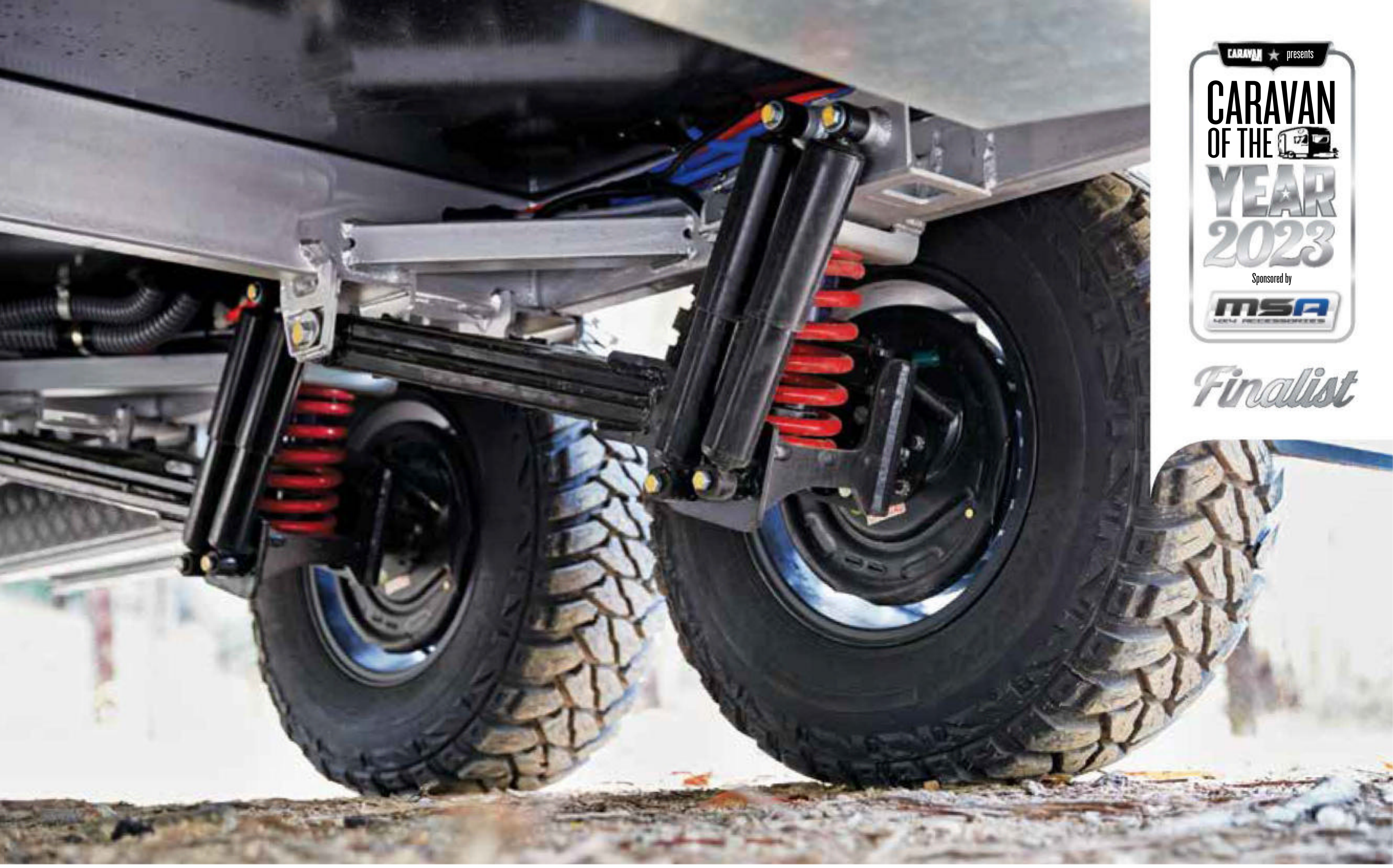
JOHN FORD *EDITOR-AT-LARGE*

This largest-yet Titan is a luxury off-grid tourer destined for couples to get into the bush for extended trips in comfort, so a reliable supply of power and water is essential. The review van included Titan's top-of-the-line stage three electronics pack with 800W of solar across four panels. The sun power feeds into three 200Ah Victron lithium batteries, so no expense has been spared here. The regulators, chargers and management system are all Victron and the inverter delivers 3000W of 240V power, so there's enough to comfortably run the air-con all day, the all-important coffee machine each morning and the exterior induction cooktop, which is manufacturered locally in Queensland by BushTucker.

Twin gas bottles run the internal stove. Immense storage options allow you to include ample food and drink supplies, and the satellite dish and Fusion sound system ensure you are self-contained for entertainment.

So, while there are systems on the market with more grunt, the Tardis has a sensible supply that will keep a couple going off-grid for as long as the water and toilet cassette hold up.

Construction starts with a robot-welded 3.5mm chassis that is x-rayed for faults in the quality control process. Next, modern body construction sees walls, roof and floor built from composite panels that bond together into a robust, weather-resistant entity. The Tardis is a big and heavy van, so the company's recent switch to AL-KO suspension is a positive move for



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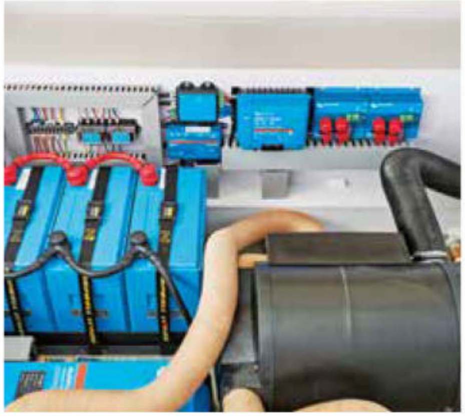


BLACKHAWK
TITAN

anyone worried about the durability of the underpinnings over time and rough treatment.

All appliances, windows and doors are locally sourced products with good reputations for reliability. The lounge is roomy, comfortable and finished in leather for an added touch of style. And while the fit on some cupboard doors isn't always perfect, we need to look at the competitive price of such a large van. Titan achieved ISO 9001:2015 quality assurance recently for its management systems. This is an internationally recognised standard to ensure organisations provide products that meet customer expectations.

As long as you keep up to date with your annual maintenance schedule, the Titan Care warranty is impressive. If there is a failure within the caravan or with any components, including appliances, Titan Care must be notified immediately. Titan Care will then arrange all claims with the suppliers of the appliances or accessories. Notably, Titan was the only entrant to bring a copy of its warranty document and it is easily accessed by owners online. In addition, a 24-hour helpline gets owners in touch with a repair agent for any issues.

The fitout and internal construction are covered for three years and the chassis and suspension warranty is five years. The caravan body is guaranteed for 10 years against delamination and water and dust ingress.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY ★

> "So, while there are systems on the market with more grunt, ***the Tardis has a sensible supply that will keep a couple going off-grid for as long as the water and toilet cassette hold up***"

BELOW The rear club lounge is spacious and surrounded by windows to let in the natural light

ALLISON WATT
CARAVAN WORLD DEPUTY EDITOR

X-FACTOR ★

"The X-factor for the Tardis is in its space and liveability. It is a couples van but with more than enough room for two people to live very comfortably"

At just under $150,000, the Tardis is not an inexpensive caravan, but it certainly offers a lot of bang for its buck. Titan designed the Tardis to be as user-friendly as possible for its owners, so its price tag reflects the large number of creature comforts the company has packed into this 23ft van.

The layout is a popular one for couples who like their own space away from each other occasionally – the front bedroom is separated from the rear living area by a central bathroom. All the main appliances that you would expect in a van these days are standard. There are no less than three TVs – two inside and one outside – and an impressive solar/power system to keep all the appliances running if you are free camping.

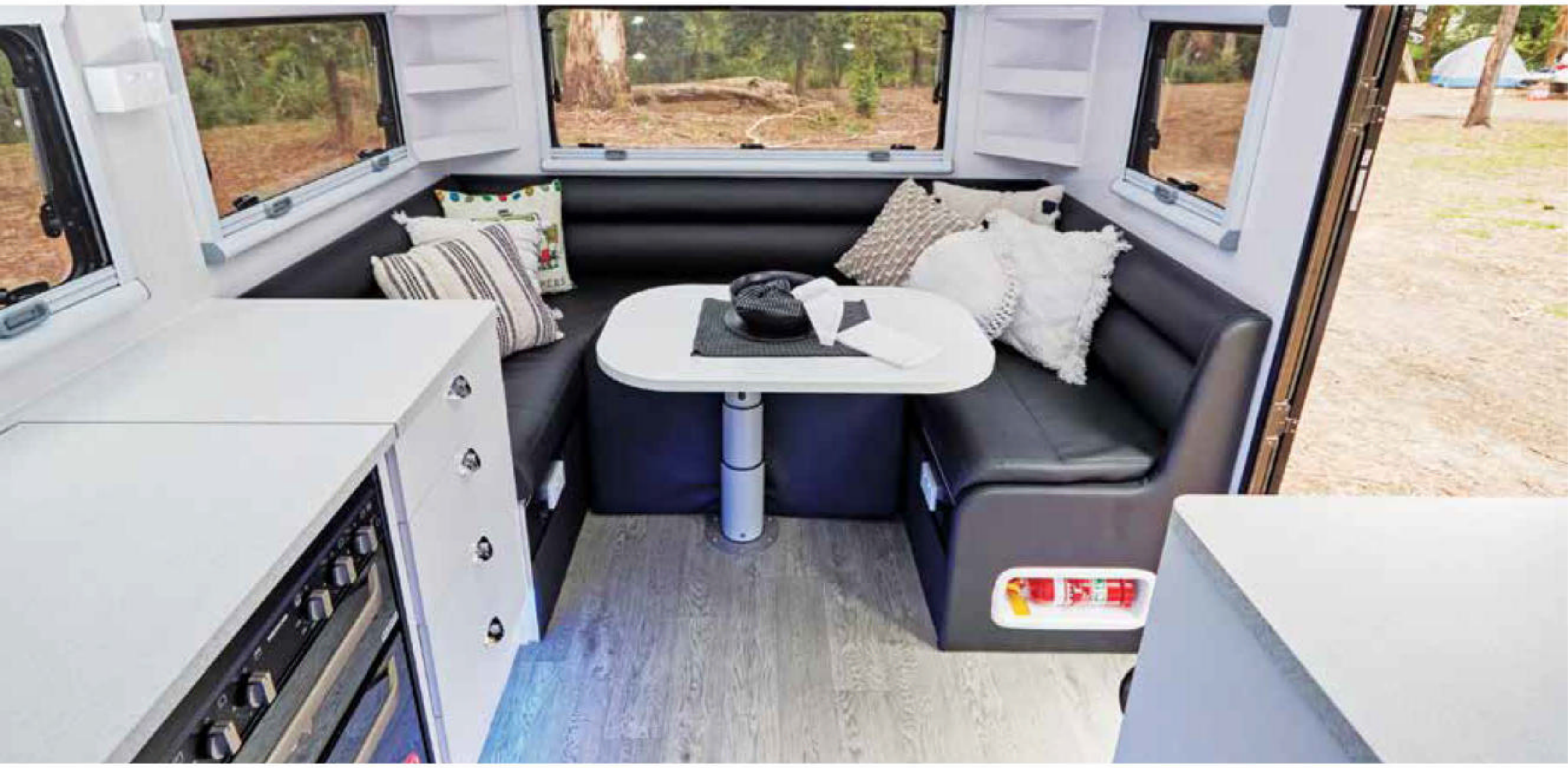
When I hear Tardis, my mind goes straight to Dr Who because the Tardis (which is an acronym of Time And Relative Dimensions In Space) was the time and space travelling machine from the science fiction in which they used to travel around.

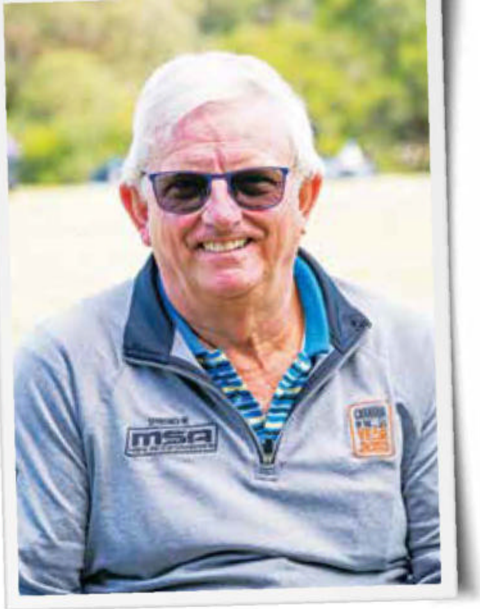
What you might not know is that Tardis is used to describe surprisingly spacious accommodation, so the name that Titan has given to this 23ft luxury van makes perfect sense. In fact, it's the longest of all the vans we judged at Caravan of the Year 2023.

The X-factor for the Tardis is in its space and liveability. It is a couples van but with more than enough room for two people to live very comfortably. It has a large, rear club lounge, a very large kitchen with workable areas on both sides of the van and a centre ensuite with toilet and vanity on one side and a separate shower cubicle on the other side. Step out of the bathroom into the spacious rear bedroom and there's plenty of space to towel off and get dressed for a day of exploring.

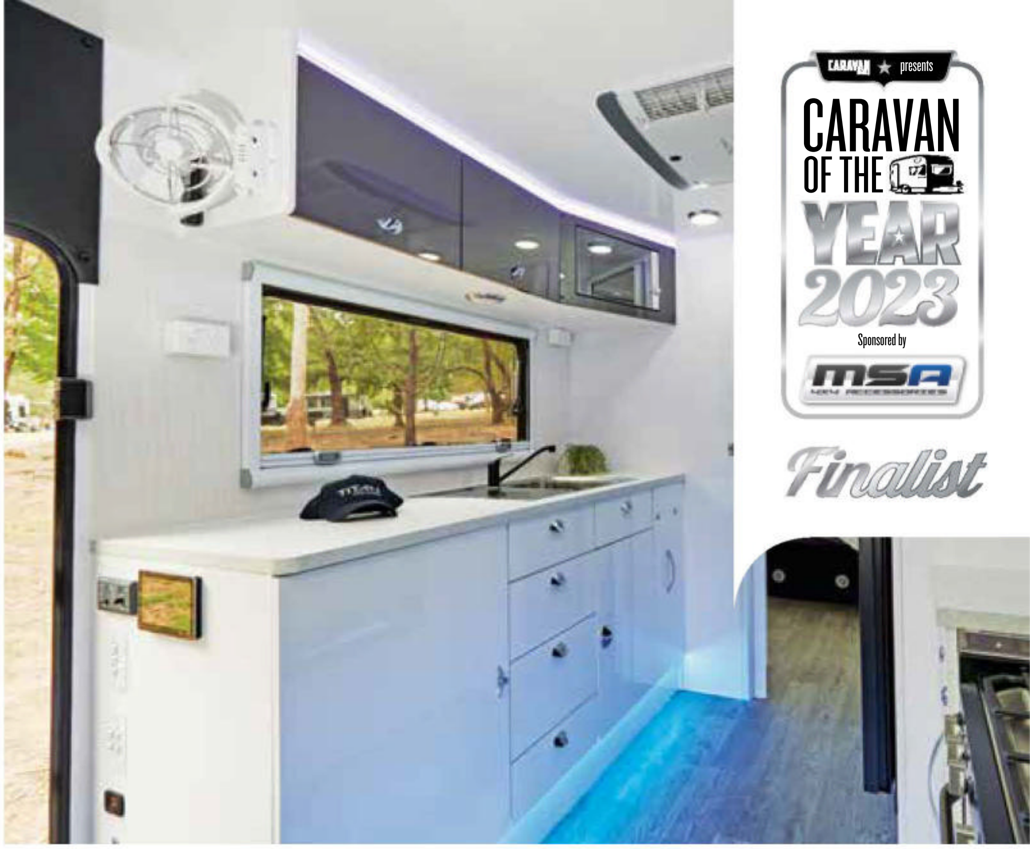
As well as space in spades, the Tardis has all the creature comforts you will ever need including a full oven, grill and cooktop, large compressor fridge, air-conditioning, heating, fans, washing machine, stereo system and three televisions – two inside and one outside.

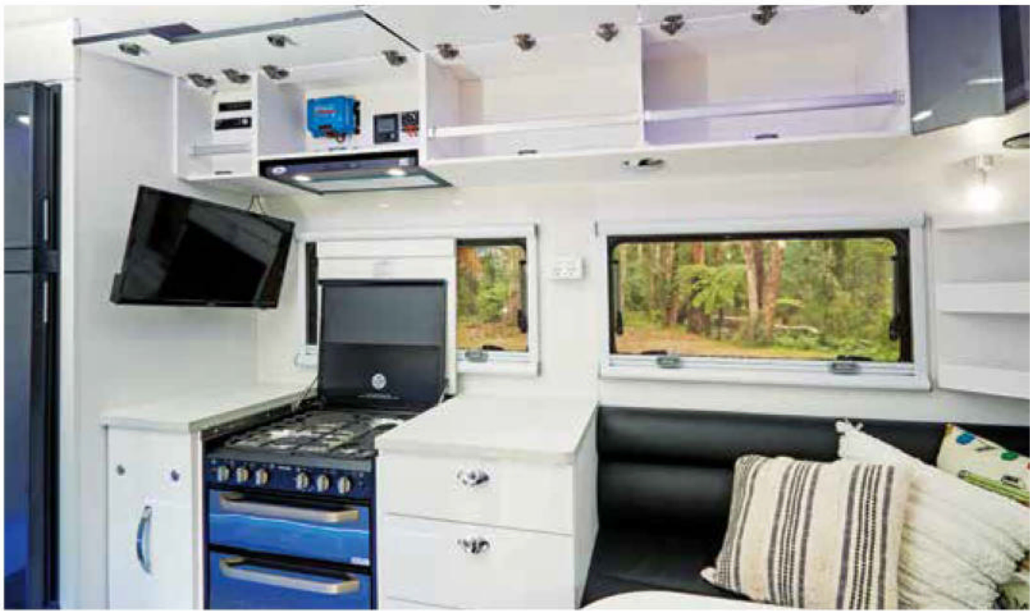
And what I really like about the Tardis is that it's big enough for couples to get away from each other – and let's face it, we all need to do that occasionally. So, if one half wants to hit the hay early, they can shut themselves away in the bedroom up front, away from the noise of the TV at the club lounge down the back.





MALCOLM STREET
CARAVAN WORLD FIELD EDITOR





ABOVE AND BELOW Those who like to cook while travelling will love the split kitchen with more than ample bench, drawer and cupboard space; The other half of the kitchen includes the full oven, grill and fridge

Titan’s Blackhawk 720 Tardis joins several other vans in this year’s COTY as being in the large category. A tare mass of 3063kg and a payload of just over 900kg make it a big towing rig. Marginal for a vehicle with a maximum towing mass of 3500kg, it's much better suited to the Chevrolet Silverado LTZ that we used for towing. Fuel consumption for the 6.2L petrol engine is a consideration. Towing length is another, and the combined rig measures something like 15m (49ft), requiring the driver's full attention for an offroad caravan. On the road, the Tardis towed quite smoothly behind the Silverado and even for a big van, there was little snatching and jerking. Around tight corners, care had to be taken not to cut the corner, especially when facing oncoming traffic.

One of the benefits of the Tardis' length is that it enables a feature I quite favour, a rear club lounge with windows all around – a preference that originates from my early motorhoming days around New Zealand. That same van length also allows for a decent-sized split kitchen, which every travelling chef will appreciate, both the benchtop space and the generous storage.

Something else that’s split is the bathroom with the shower cubicle on one side and the toilet/vanity on the other. That arrangement also effectively separates the bed/bathroom from the living space. A win-win all around. Up front, just like the rear area, the island bed is surrounded by windows too. Apart from the usual benefits, space perception is excellent in a slightly confined space.

The Tardis is well equipped for those who like to live outside. A slide-out kitchen is fitted into the front tunnel storage. It has an induction hob, stainless steel sink and two hinged extensions. In addition to that, the drawbar storage box has a slide-out fitted barbecue. Cooking any which way you like! With a fair chunk of the external storage taken by cooking facilities, part of the tunnel storage is still available at the front and there’s the rear area under the club lounge with bin doors on both sides. On the day of our judging, it was very overcast, which showed to good effect the extensive external lighting on the Tardis. There are seven fittings which are very bright indeed, but you won’t get any complaints from the neighbours because the van has external light dimmer controls and also dual light control – white or yellow light – which helps with not attracting insects. Apart from anything else, the Blackhawk 720 Tardis is quite a stylish-looking van and like its namesake, it is quite big on the inside but definitely not that small on the outside.

LIVEABILITY ★

“That same van length also allows for a decent-sized split kitchen, *which every travelling chef will appreciate, both the bench top space and the generous storage*”

MY DREAM RV
LIVE IT UP
CBD·523

SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

FOLLOW THAT DREAM

CARAVAN presents

CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

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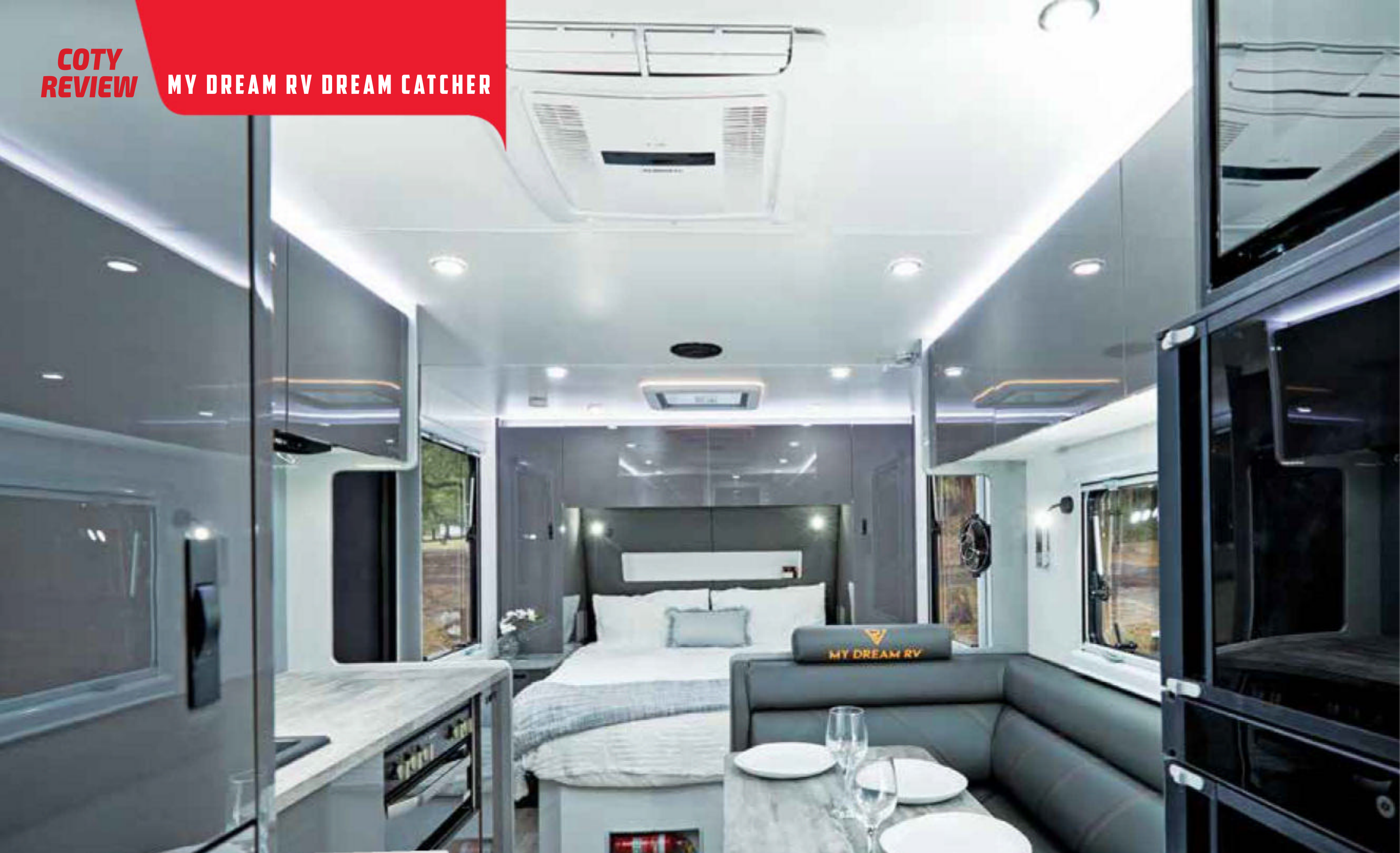
Finalist

My Dream RV is something of a new name in the world of caravans, but the design team behind the name is not, having been involved in the industry for some years.

Words *COTY Judges*
Pics *Graeme Neander and Phil Cerbu*

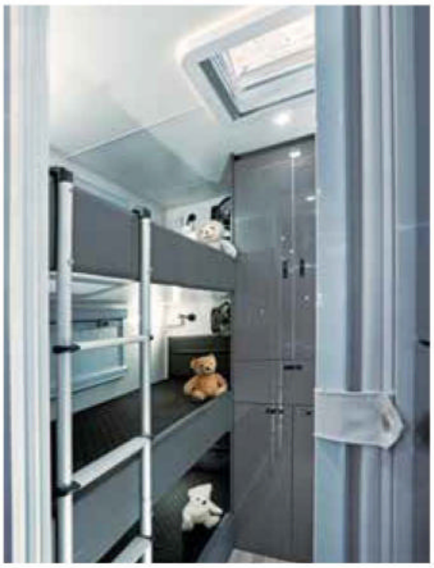


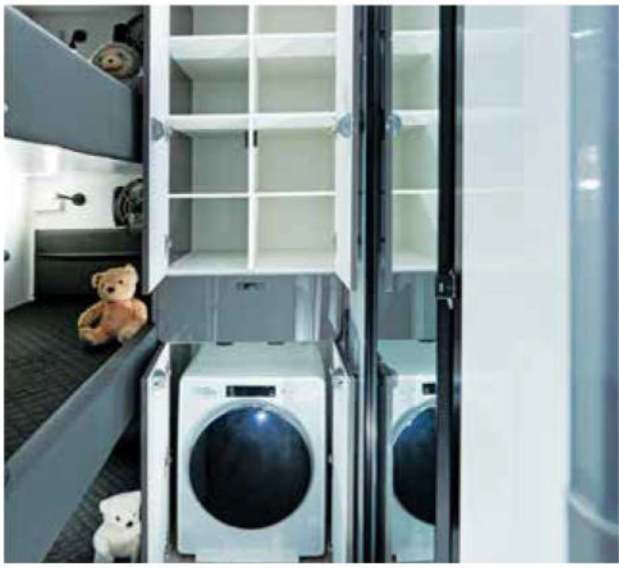
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The 22ft Dream Catcher isn't small, but it'll fit the whole family; An aerodynamic look that will certainly impress; Plenty of storage; A triple bunk layout down the back

MALCOLM STREET
CARAVAN WORLD FIELD EDITOR

In addition to the knowledgable design team, one of the partners in the business comes from a mining background with plenty of industrial experience. It was, therefore, with some interest that I looked over the Dream Catcher caravan. One of the first things to catch the eye is the aerodynamic look of the curved front. The second, in this case, was the bright orange colour scheme. The Dream Catcher has an external length of 6.7m (22ft) and a tare mass of 2850kg, so it's not a particularly small van.

However, that's good because the Dream Catcher is a family van with an island bed up front and triple bunks down the back. Although our tow test vehicle was a Ford Ranger which coped with the towing, I'd reckon with a family on board the van





SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING ★

"The van is well set up for a family *with room to move*" is more like Toyota LandCruiser towing territory at least.

I'd have expected something different from a new manufacturer, but the Dream Catcher has a meranti timber frame. Instead of opting for a one-piece floor, the manufacturer uses multi-piece hardwood with the joins on top of the chassis rails and cross sections. Built for offroad use, the Dream Catcher has a Cruisemaster DO35 hitch and rides on TuffRide independent suspension with coil springs, dual EFS shock absorbers and trailing arms. The extended drawbar is handy for tight turns.

A look under the van reveals good ground clearance with nothing obvious being where it shouldn't be. The alloy checkerplate protection fitted in front of the PVC grey water tank drain is a notable addition. It looks like an afterthought, but the location is not bad idea for the somewhat vulnerable PVC piping. With front tunnel storage, a drawbar storage box and a mid-nearside wall storage bin, there wasn't an external storage problem. Notable was the SOG toilet ventilation system fitted to the Dometic cassette.

Inside the Dream Catcher, the glossy laminate finish doesn't quite require sunglasses, but it certainly grabs the attention. As does the extensive use of LED strip lighting. The van is well set up for a family with room to move. There's plenty of storage space, and the kitchen pantry and rear bedroom cupboard have multiple shelves to ensure easy packing.

Innovation-wise, the party piece of the Dream Catcher is its external profile. Aerodynamically, it looks good, and it would be interesting to do an extended fuel test, but as well, the curve and colour is something of an eye-catcher. In the Australian market, where many caravans look similar, that's not a silly idea!

MY DREAM RV
LIVE IT UP

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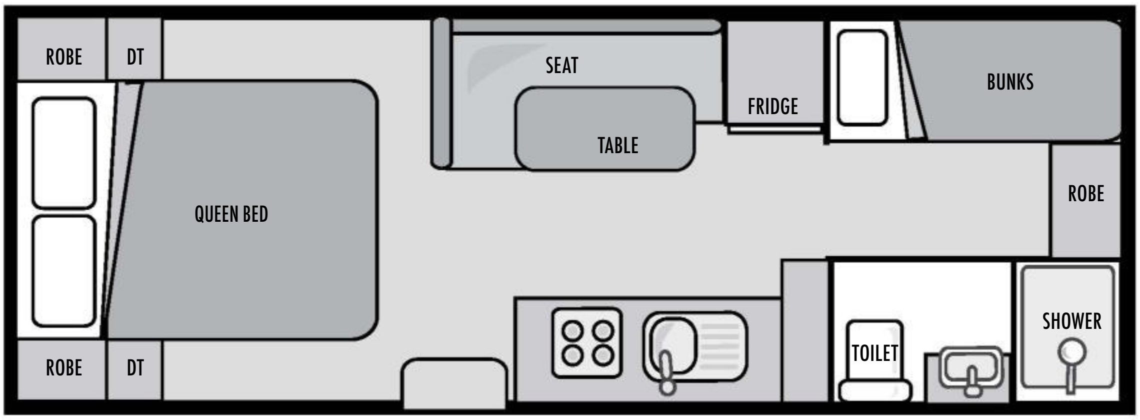
Finalist



RIGHT A stylish and family-friendly kitchen

MY DREAM RV
DREAM CATCHER

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Overall length 9.7m (31ft 9in)
External body length 6.7m (22ft)
External body width 2.5m (8ft 2in)
Travel height 3.2m (10ft 6in)
Internal height 2.03m (6ft 6in)
Tare 2850kg
ATM 3500kg
Payload 650kg
Ball weight 170kg

EXTERNAL
Structure CNC cut meranti timber
Cladding Aluminium cladding and 600mm side checkerplate
Chassis 6in Proline chassis
Suspension Independent trailing arm (TuffRide IRS)
Coupling DO35
Brakes 12in electric brakes
Wheels 265/75 R16 A/T and alloy wheels
Water 2 x 95L freshwater tanks and 1 x 95L grey water tank as standard
Battery BMPRO HA battery management, 2 x 130Ah lithium batteries
Solar 2 x 195W solar panels with 30A regulator
Air-conditioner Yes
Gas 2 x 9kg gas bottles
Sway control BMPRO

INTERNAL
Cooking 3 x gas and 1 x electric mini grill
Fridge RMD 10.5X
Microwave 25L
Bathroom Ensuite
Washing machine Yes
Hot water Instant gas

PRICE FROM $98,990

MORE INFORMATION
My Dream RV
P: 09 7042 1009
E: mathew@mydreamrv.com.au
W: www.mydreamrv.com.au

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Finalist
Do not shut lid when burner alight
Éteindre tous les brûleurs avant de fermer le couvercle
THETFORD

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT North-south main bed; A full height pantry; Generous underbed storage; TuffRide suspension

TIM VAN DUYL

CARAVAN WORLD CREATIVE DIRECTOR

We felt the as-towed weight of the Dream Catcher was probably around 3000kg after taking into account a few props and bits and bobs inside. That's a considerable weight by old standards but actually not too bad for a big, family van like this and it towed brilliantly.

We weren't using what I would call a great tow vehicle in the 2L diesel Ford Ranger, but its 10-speed gearbox hid the small engine's peaky nature pretty well. I think a good choice would be a large SUV and not necessarily a new one – a 200 Series would be ideal and offers the kids a bit more room in the back than the Ranger too at a similar price.

Under the Dream Catcher was TuffRide suspension crafted by the same folk that make the impressive chassis. Using twin EFS shocks, it soaked up our pothole-ridden tow route with ease. I think it towed exceptionally well.

The team has packed a lot into the Dream Catcher with triple bunks and a north-south main bed. This has meant the lounge is arguably too small for a family of five but to that I say – get outside, kids!

LIVEABILITY ★

"There is a good level of storage in the van, something every parent will appreciate"

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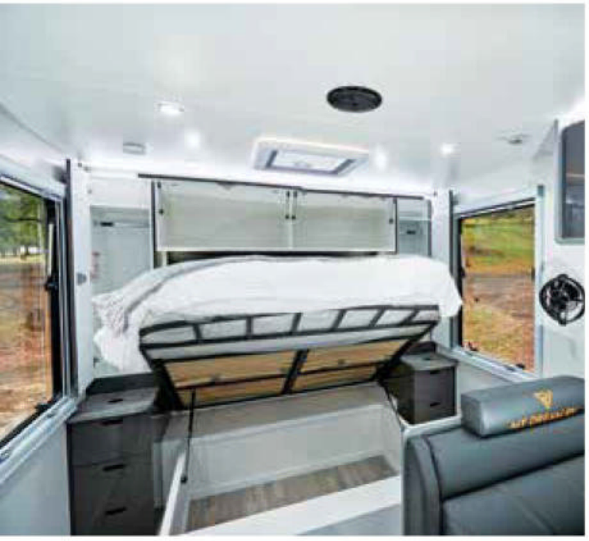
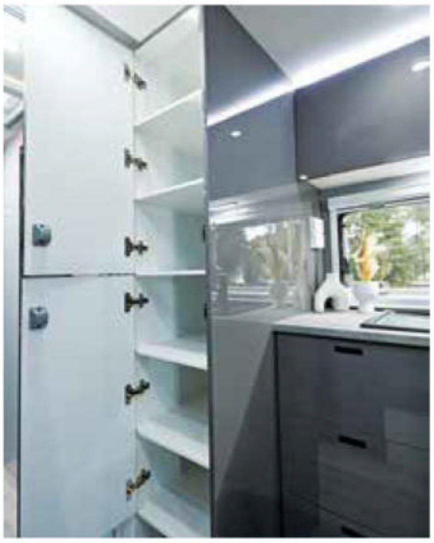
MY DREAM RV





There is a good level of storage in the van, something every parent will appreciate even if you only have 650kg of payload to work with. Under the bed is cavernous, the pantry is full-height and the bathroom area has plenty of cupboards that you can adjust to suit your preferred way.

Once on the road, there is enough power to run the fridge, lights and TV for weeks and enough solar to suggest you'll probably never run them empty. There is no inverter though, so they won't have a hard time either. Water capacity is on the low side if you allow the kids in the great shower. Point them at a river and be careful with it and you might eke out a week before you hit a holiday park to power up the washing machine, get the kids clean and restock.

ABOVE All the furniture and cabinetry are constructed in-house

VALUE FOR MONEY ★

"The van, as reviewed, sneaks in at $98,990 … *I rate that as great value*"

JOHN FORD *EDITOR-AT-LARGE*

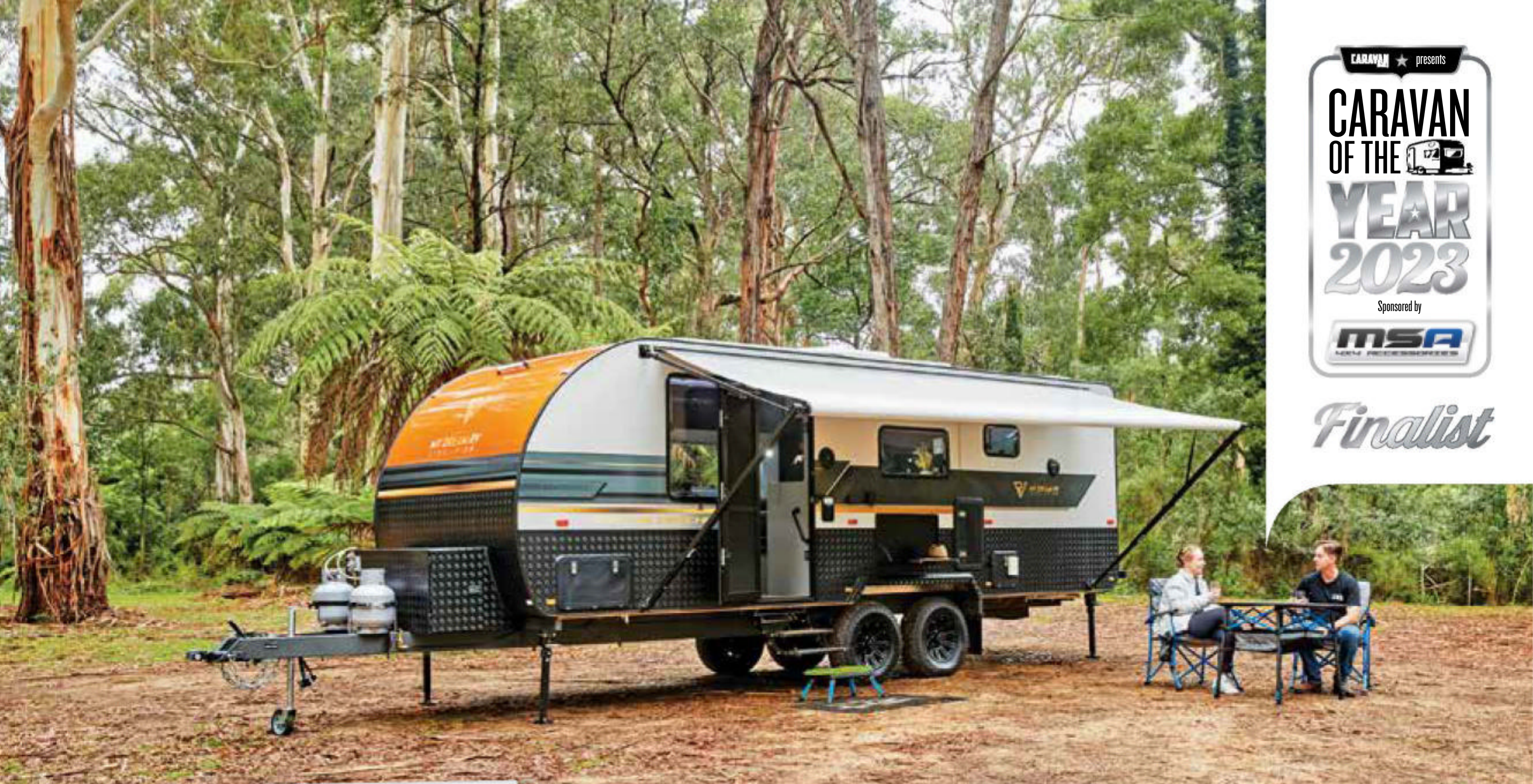
When reviewing this van earlier this year, I was struck by the Dream Catcher's excellent value. An offroad family van under $100k is unusual in today's market, and the van, as reviewed, sneaks in at $98,990. I rate that as great value, and by the reaction to the van at our showcase, the public agrees.

You get a lot for the price. It's a 22ft family van, which gives respectable room for a family to feel comfortable. The quality is high from a new brand out to make a name for itself in the market. Despite being new to the local scene, I'm told that owners have valuable contacts in the supply chain that help keep costs down.

The van presents well with a striking exterior, a well-finished internal layout and all the correct name-brand appliances and fittings to impress. Judging value for money can be subjective at times, but in giving the Dream Catcher a high score, I was influenced by many vans of its style, size and capability being tens of thousands of dollars more expensive. I'm convinced the brand will have longevity, so resale value in a buoyant market should stay high over time.

This is one of the first models from new builder My Dream RV, and it's not your over-the-top macho offroader. A rounded front end is unusual in current designs, and some I have seen haven't quite got the look right. Instead, the Dream Catcher is a nicely composed design that works with the sculptured toolbox to help with a well-balanced visual effect. Orange panels at the ends bring some zest to the scene, and the bright colours emphasise the size of the van. It's 22ft long; if size matters, this will impress.

For astute buyers, the price will be a significant factor because weighed up against competitors in the family offroad market the van is a standout. There's also bragging rights in owning a van from the new brand that seems to be doing everything right to earn a place in the market.



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ABOVE The curved design and bright colours of the Dream Catcher make it stand out from other vans in the same class

BUILD QUALITY ★

> *"The design and curve of the Dream Catcher — as well as its striking orange exterior —* sets it apart from other vans in this class"

ALLISON WATT
CARAVAN WORLD DEPUTY EDITOR

To ensure it can produce a quality product at an affordable price, My Dream RV has put a fair bit of effort into optimising manufacturing processes and supply chains. A video on its build process is available on the website.

My Dream RV uses a meranti timber frame, sitting atop a Proline 6in heavy-duty chassis with DuraGal zinc coating. A finger-joined multipiece floor is also 12mm meranti timber for stability and strength. The timber work is waterproofed to a certain height to account for any ingress caused by creek crossings and the like. Exterior panels are CNC precision cut Alucobond aluminium composite panels. The roof and walls are insulated.

All furniture and cabinetry are constructed in-house, again using the precision CNC process. There is checkerplate all round on the Dream Catcher, including the front toolbox which custom fits nicely around the curved nose of the van.

The design and curve of the Dream Catcher – as well as its striking orange exterior – sets it apart from other vans in this class. A team of designers came up with the final product to reduce drag, increase fuel economy and provide better stability on the road.

TuffRide IRS suspension, a galvanised tunnel boot, 265/75 R16 A/T and alloy wheels, 12in electric brakes and double-glazed Aussie Traveller windows are standard.

My Dream RV takes customer care seriously. It sells through a network of Caravan HQ dealers in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and is hoping to branch out into other states soon.

A five-year warranty is offered on the chassis and suspension, three years on the structure and complete replacement on all appliances within three years. There is a handy online form that owners can use to alert My Dream RV to potential warranty issues – photos can be uploaded via this form as well.

The Dream Catcher is a full offroad caravan and comes with two 130Ah lithium batteries and two 195W solar panels with 30A regulator all managed by a BMPRO battery management system. That will enable you to run the compressor fridge, lighting and 12V pump for your water. There is no inverter so running air-conditioning, the washing machine and other 240V appliances is not an option in the model we judged, however, an inverter could probably be available as an optional extra. Gas provides for cooking and hot water.

However, so long as the sun is shining on the solar panels, you will be comfortable off-grid as long as your water holds out. The Dream Catcher has two 95L freshwater tanks and one 95L grey water tank, so not a huge amount of water capacity and if you have a full house of two adults and three kids on board, you'll have to manage the use of showers and the loo.

WONDERLAND RV
XTR 2200
D69·495

SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

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Finalist

The team at Caravan World *has been privileged to get the opportunity to review a number of* Wonderland RVs *over the years.*

Words COTY Judges
Pics Phil Cerbu, Josh Hanger and Graeme Neander

WONDERFUL WONDERLAND

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT Quality interior fittings and decor; Three lithium batteries; Cruisemaster XT air suspension

TIM VAN DUYL
CARAVAN WORLD CREATIVE DIRECTOR

After having chauffeured an XTR across three states and having towed a few more Wonderland RVs around Victoria, I reckon I have the knowledge to suggest they hit the mark for what they are designed to do.

In this XTR 2200's case, its role is to take a family anywhere without the fear of running out of power or a worry about its reliability. From the tyres to the tip of the digital TV antenna, this van has been built without compromise. Yes, it has come out weighty and you will need a big US truck to haul it, but it has a fit and finish that rivals upscale apartments and a build to outlast the worst corrugations you could tow it over.

The move to more subtle graphics and manchester combinations have taken the luxurious feel of the latest Wonderland RVs to a whole new level.

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING ★

"*It has a fit and finish that rivals upscale apartments and a build* to outlast the worst corrugations you could tow it over"

B-TEC
LITHIUM

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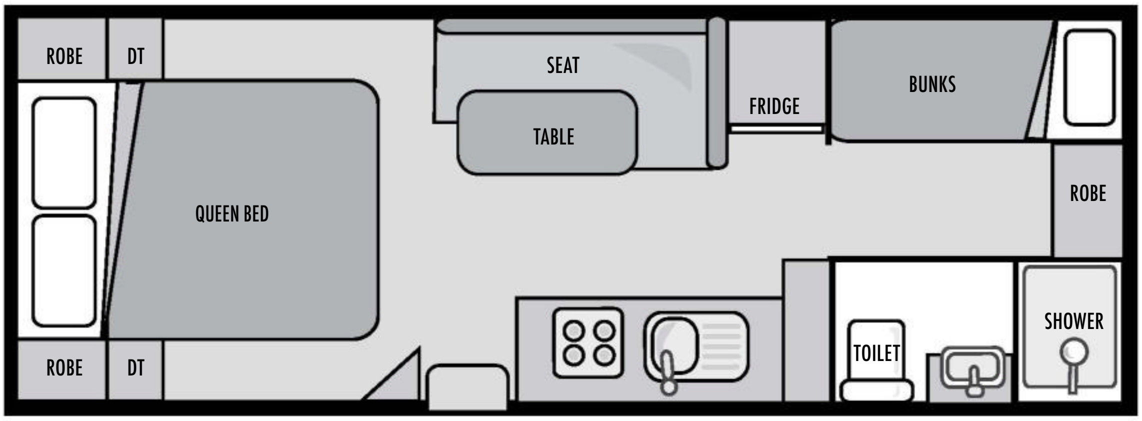
ROBE
DT
SEAT
FRIDGE
BUNKS
TABLE
ROBE
QUEEN BED
SHOWER
TOILET
ROBE
DT

WONDERLAND
RV XTR 2200

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Overall length 9.1m (29ft 10in)
External body length 6.76m (22ft 2in)
External body width 2.48m (8ft 1in)
Travel height 3.2m (10ft 5in)
Internal height 1.98m (6ft 5in)
Tare 3340kg
ATM 4500kg
Payload 1160kg (calculated)
Ball weight 280kg

EXTERNAL
Structure Structural grade ply walls, CAD designed, CNC router cut interlocking
Cladding DIBOND composite
Chassis 12in Truss Chassis in a black powder coat
Suspension 4.5T Cruisemaster XT AIR L3 Wireless
Coupling DO35
Brakes Drum brakes
Wheels 265/75R16 BF Goodrich KO2
Water 2 x 100L freshwater tanks, 1 x 65L dedicated drinking water tank, 1 x 100L grey water tank
Battery 1 x 450Ah lithium battery, 3000W Inverter, Redarc Redvision Battery Management System
Solar Standard: 5 x 200W solar panels
Air-conditioner Dometic Ibis 4
Gas 2 x 8kg
Sway control Dexter Stability Control

INTERNAL
Cooking Swift mini grill and gas burners
Fridge Dometic compressor 188L
Microwave 23L
Bathroom Shower and Thetford toilet
Washing machine Yes
Hot water Swift gas/electric

PRICE FROM $164,810.92

OPTIONS FITTED
- King-sized bed and mattress
- Thinscape compressed laminate benchtop material
- Dometic CaraD door 1850
- Dual bedroom windows (4 x 900x450)
- Extra 65L freshwater tank
- Full one-piece 35mm composite roof from front floor to rear floor
- 39mm composite floor
- Custom Fusion Audio Fusion Ra770
  - 4ch Amplifier
  - Subwoofer 10in
  - 8.8in Signature Speakers
  - Erx 400i Ent Remote
- 4.5T Cruisemaster ATX Air L3 Wireless
- Disc brakes
- 18in Roh 285/70r18 wheels and tyres
- Single wood box
- DO45 Cruisemaster recessed and 4.5T chains
- iSi quad front bike rack
- Enerdrive Simarine W 5 tank module
- Dual solar regulator
- 3000W Inverter Combi Enerdrive
- 3 x 300Ah Enerdrive Drive B-Tec batteries
- 8 x 210W solar panels (1680W total)
- 28in Smart TV
- 4 x Sirocco Fans
- CaraFan Dust Reduction System
- K4 Plus Weber and barbecue provision, induction and black sink
- Eberspacher Hydroplate diesel heater and hot water unit
- Safiery dual induction hob
- Dishwasher
- OGO composting toilet

PRICE AS SHOWN $246,990

MORE INFORMATION
Wonderland RV
P: (03) 9357 8885
E: sales@wonderlandrv.com.au
W: www.wonderlandrv.com.au

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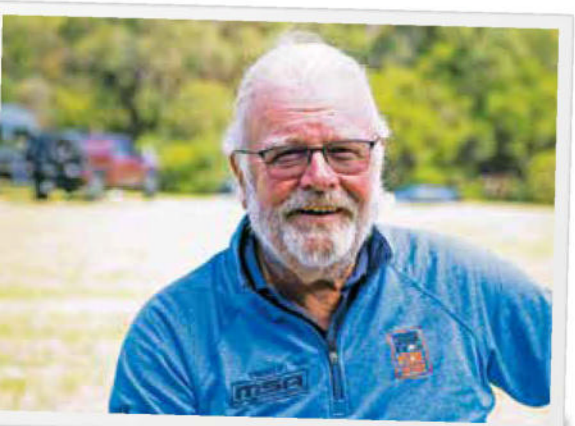
Finalist
WONDERLAND
WONDERLAND RV

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The bathroom with washing machine and composting toilet; Extended stays off-grid are not a problem for the Wonderland; Power is provided by the proven Enerdrive system.



JOHN FORD *EDITOR AT LARGE*

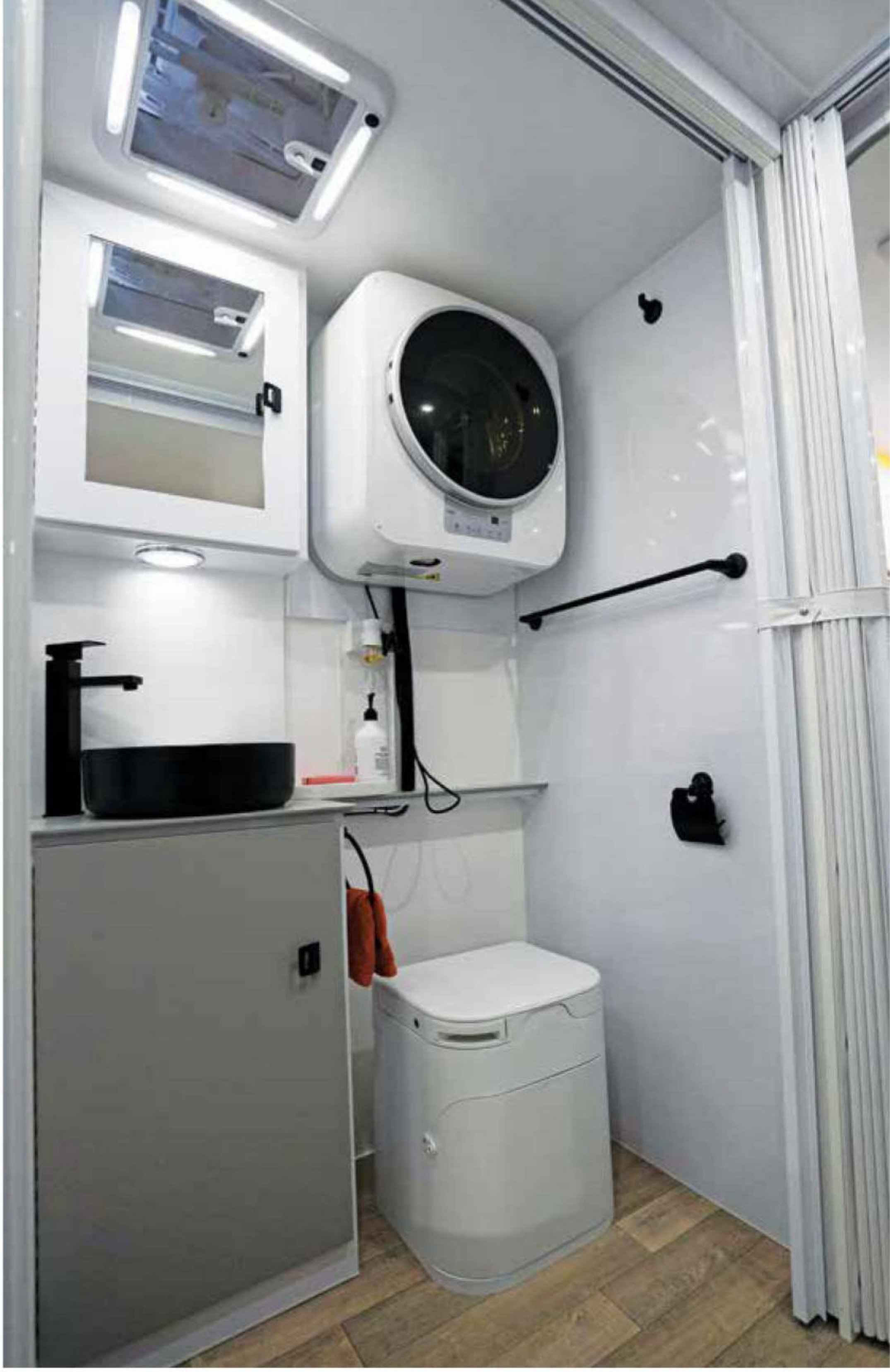
The XTR is a big family van with expectations that it can journey off-grid for extended stays with a family, and that puts big pressure on the power and water supplies. Wonderland chose an Enerdrive system for its reliability, safety and performance. It's a proven package that works effortlessly and provides a sensible amount of power. Up top, 1680W of solar feeds three 300Ah B-Tec batteries through Enerdrive's MPPT charger/3000W inverter and a monitoring system compatible with a mobile phone to check system condition.

Combined with a Ebespacher diesel combi heater, you only need gas for the barbecue and even then, the decent size inverter means you could opt for an electric only solution. Water will potentially be a problem with any family in the bush because it adds to weight when travelling. So, the 65L dedicated drinking water tank makes sense and another 265L for general purposes isn't bad.

When dealing with the needs of a family off-grid, I like the composting toilet for its ease of use and environmental benefits.

The XTR is the premium package in the Wonderland range, and it shows. Presentation is an important ingredient of the buying process, and you can't help being wowed by the look of the van inside and out. And it's not all show.

From the neatly finished and well-engineered S&M truss chassis to the single-piece roof, the Wonderland team insists



INVERTER / CHARGER
DC to AC true sinewave inverter
programmable automatic battery charger
automatic transfer switch
www.enerdrive.com.au
ePRO
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Finalist

things are done properly. Wonderland is a boutique builder out to rationalise the high buy price with high-end finishes and durability. They go the extra mile to ensure the CNC 'Wonderwall' construction stays weatherproof, but with this manner of construction regular servicing is essential. The interior material choice, colours and hardware all fit the high-end customer expectations.

Appliances are all quality; the new style flat windows suit the modern theme and the composite flat floor allows for a versatile layout and the best use of space. The Cruisemaster ATX suspension is top-level equipment, and the composting toilet is efficient and a sensible inclusion in an off-grid family touring van.

With 10 years of production under its belt, Wonderland has established a solid reputation for looking after buyers. The Cruisemaster suspension and the S&M chassis have a five-year warranty, while the van structure of the body and furniture are covered for three years. A dedicated staff member takes care of any warranty issues and directs customers to a network of repair agents when needed.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY ★

"Wonderland chose an Enerdrive system for *its reliability, safety and performance*"

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The interior appliances and finishings rival upscale apartments; A first for caravans – integrated dishwasher

ALLISON WATT
CARAVAN WORLD DEPUTY EDITOR

At just shy of $250,000, the Wonderland was the most expensive caravan we judged at this year's Caravan of the Year Awards. Add to that the cost of a big US truck such as a Chev or a Ram – which is what you will need to tow it – and you're looking at a rig that is nudging half a million dollars.

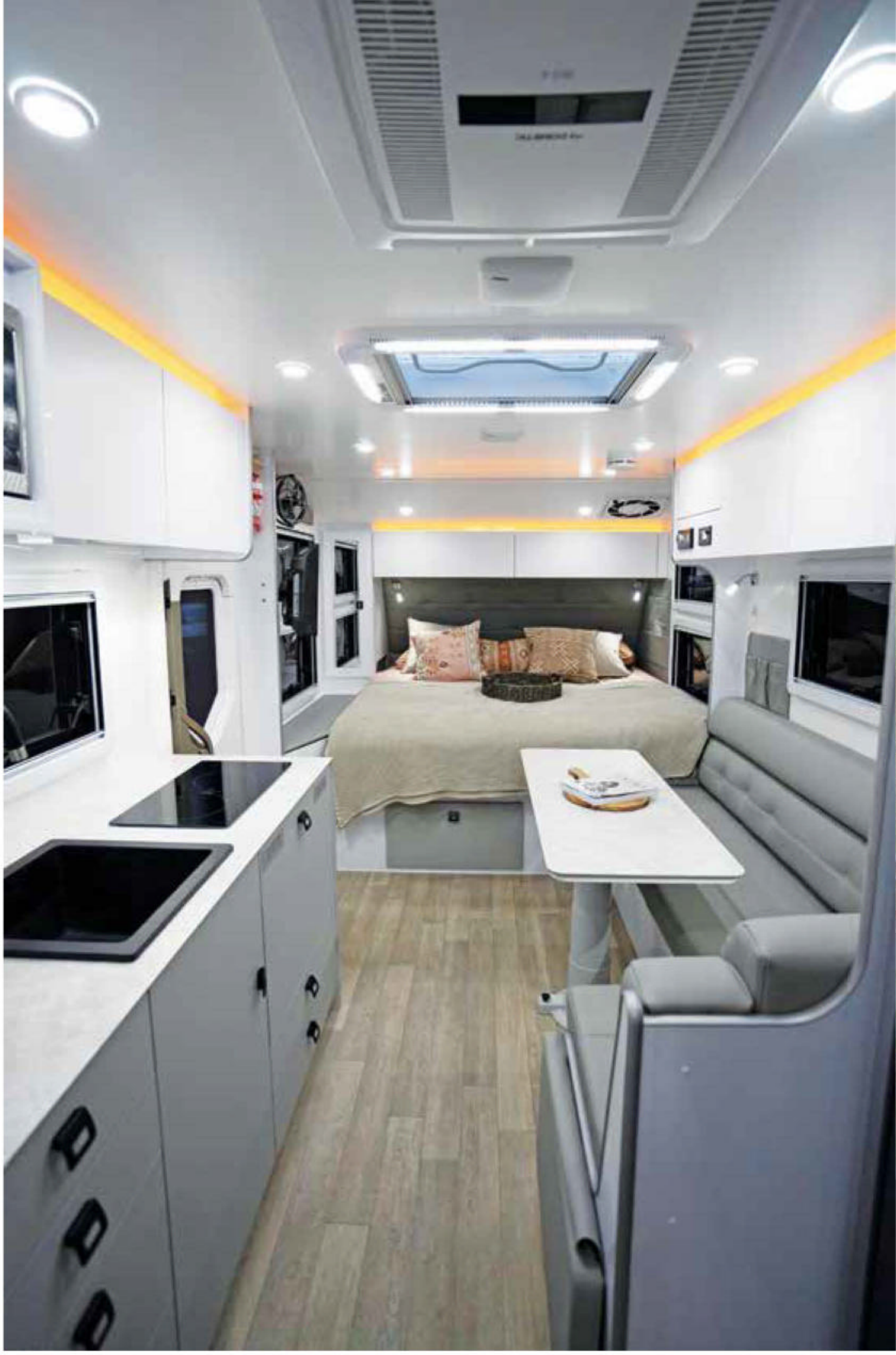
But for that money, you won't be left wanting for anything. The Wonderland has high-end off-grid capability, a quality finish and all the creature comforts that you'd need to live comfortably on the road indefinitely.

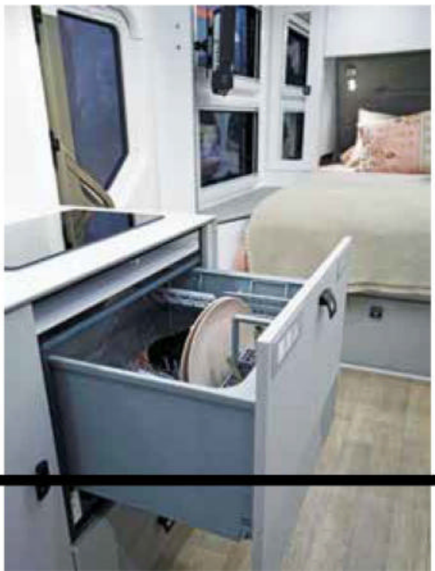
That sort of money is out of reach for a lot of folks, particularly in a challenging economic climate. COVID gifted us with many lessons about how we live and work, and many families made the decision to sell up, leave the suburbs and the 9-5 office job and embrace the lure of the Big Lap – including working and home-schooling on the road. If your caravan is your home and you are living the dream, then the cost seems justified.

There's nothing subtle about the Wonderland – it's a van that wants to turn heads wherever it goes, but its flashy looks are backed up by a quality build and high-end features.

This is a big roomy family van that oozes quality inside and outside, with all the appliances and offroad capability you will need to explore the great outdoors in a high level of comfort.

And if two kitchen sinks – inside and outside – aren't enough for washing up at the end of a meal, just pop the dishes in the dishwasher and put your feet up for the rest of the night.





X-FACTOR ★

"If two kitchen sinks – inside and outside – aren't enough for washing up at the end of a meal, ***just pop the dishes in the dishwasher***"

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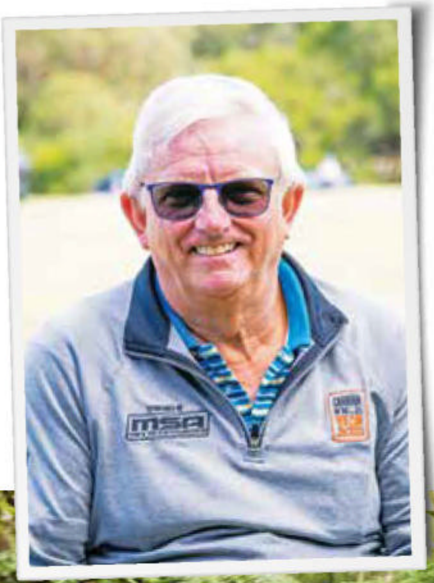
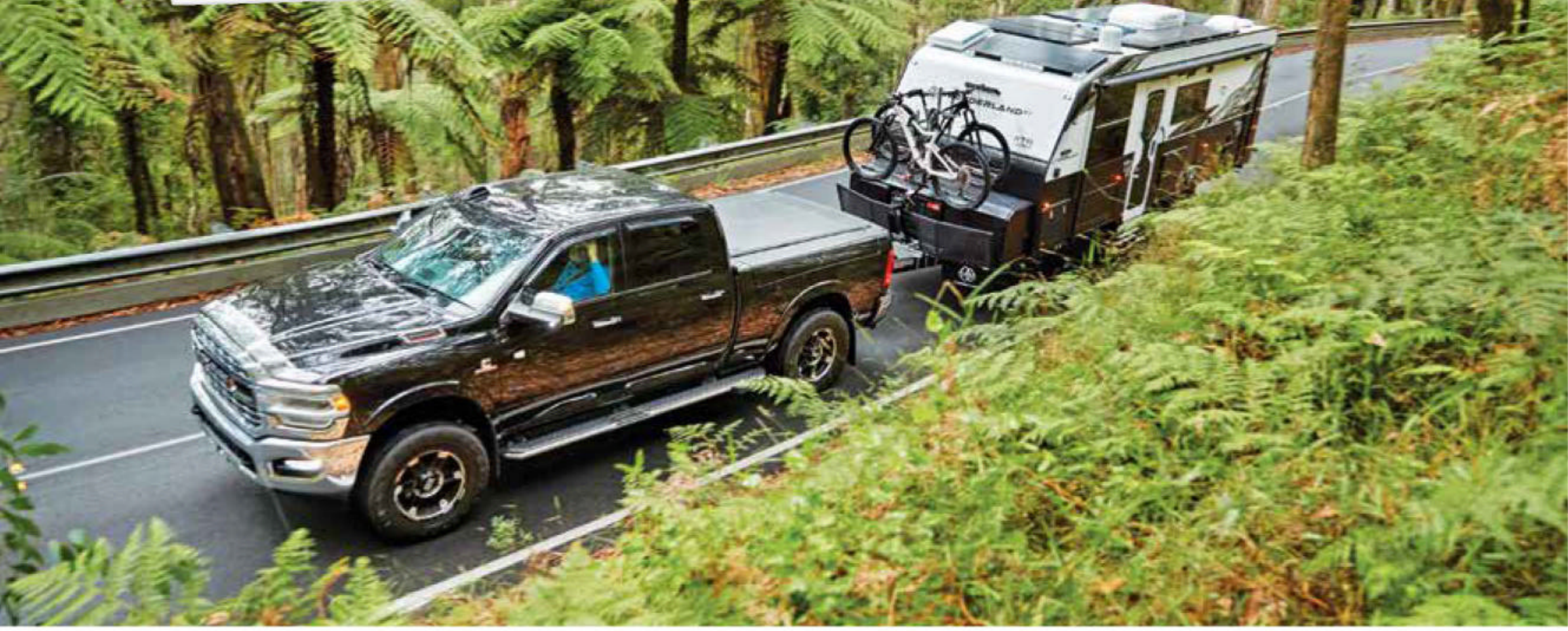


MALCOLM STREET
CARAVAN WORLD FIELD EDITOR

TOWABILITY ★

"Having a body length of 6.76m (22ft 2in), a tare mass of 3340kg and an ATM of 4500kg, ***it's no small towing proposition***"



ABOVE With an ATM of 4500kg the Wonderland is no lightweight, so you'll need a big US truck to pull it

Wonderland RV's XTR2200 is a big van. Having an external body length of 6.76m (22ft 2in), a tare mass of 3340kg and an ATM of 4500kg, it's no small towing proposition, and for any prospective van purchaser, that's a serious consideration. Any vehicle with a maximum towing mass of 3500kg is out of contention, so something like a RAM 2500 Laramie with a 4500kg towing mass is a much better consideration. When hitched up, the XTR220 towed in a mostly well-behaved manner – something to be expected with a tow vehicle like the RAM 2500. The disc brakes fitted to the Cruisemaster ATX air bag suspension work well.

Something to keep in mind with a towing combination like this is that the length of the towing combination is over 14m (46ft) and has to be considered when negotiating everything from tight turns along bush tracks to the driveways of city service stations where there's often not much manoeuvring room. I'm used to handling big motorhomes, but the articulated combination does take a little getting used to.

For a family, the XTR has much to offer. The layout looks like a standard front bed/rear bathroom arrangement but differs slightly. For instance, the north-south island bed fills the entire front area with no side walkways. Sure, there's a lack of one wardrobe but the trade-off is a much broader and more comfortable bed. I like the large windows in the front bedroom, but the double-tiered arrangement offers almost the same area but is better from a security point of view. The lower window can be closed at night, but the top window is left wide open without too much of a problem.

I don't know whether it reflects future trends, but the kitchen, complete with an induction hob, has a reasonably sized dishwater. Is that easier than getting the junior members to do the washing up? The kitchen bench area isn't huge but has a very generous amount of storage space.

A more definite trend seen in a few bunk vans with bathrooms is to leave the bathroom area open and facing the bunks. It's a good space perception idea but I suspect the concertina curtain across the bathroom area will get some use!

A benefit of the front bed arrangement is that it allows for an extended external storage area underneath. Or rather two, because there's the regular tunnel storage and a wider area that will easily take all the usual camping items and a few recreational ones. Towball weight might be a consideration.

SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

CARAVAN presents
CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023
Sponsored by MSA 4X4 ACCESSORIES

Finalist

The much-awaited release of Cub Campers' first caravan last year didn't disappoint, and the judges discovered that the C16 lives up to the hype.

***Words** COTY Judges*
***Pics** Phil Cerbu and Josh Hanger*

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Storage nook at the bedhead; A compact but stylish internal kitchen; The stylish external kitchen

ALLISON WATT
CARAVAN WORLD DEPUTY EDITOR

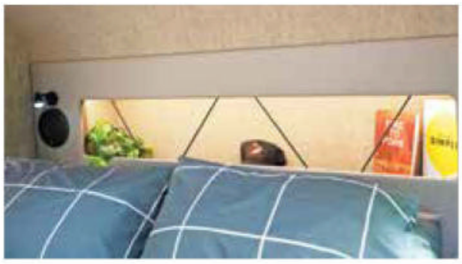
Cub has been building tough offroad camper trailers for the past 55 years and has a reputation as being among the best in the business.

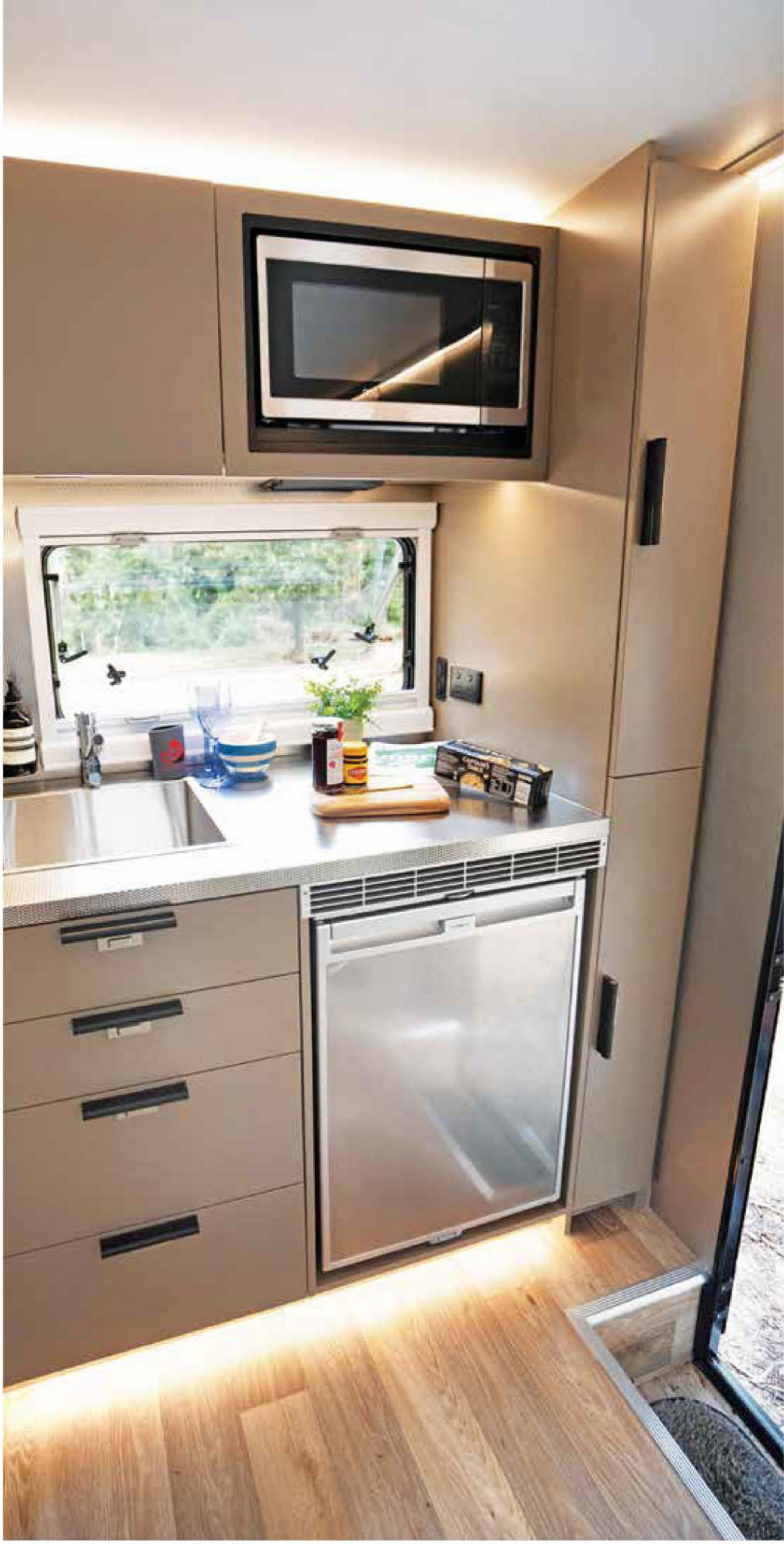
So, there was decades of experience to draw upon when Cub made its first foray into a full caravan in late 2022. There was much hype around the release of Cub's C16 hybrid caravan and *Caravan World* Creative Director Tim van Duyl was among the first to take one out on the road for a review. It impressed us then and, after a few tweaks and changes as a result of customer feedback, it's still as impressive and is earning a legion of fans. And as a lightweight, offroad van with an exterior kitchen – the C16 and Cub's L16 vans proudly retain their hybrid status.

Designed for an adventure-seeking couple or family, the C16 is neither big nor pretentious but, as we discovered, some of its features will literally take your breath away.

INNOVATION ★

"Step into the C16 ***and there is an instant wow factor***"





CARAVAN presents
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The C16 is an Australian-made timberless hybrid caravan built to tackle the toughest Aussie conditions. Despite being a relative newcomer to the caravan scene, the C16 has Cub Campers' five decades of experience and reputation behind it.

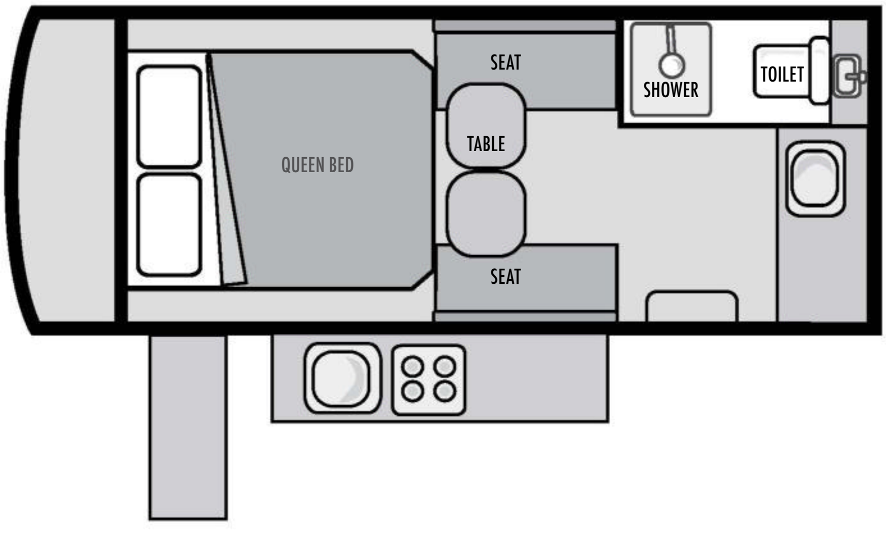
It's a tough offroader, but at just 16ft and on a single axle it is much smaller than some of its competitors in this class. With a tare of just 2100kg (2207kg as tested), it is lightweight, easy to tow with a mainstream SUV or dual cab ute and has a load of remote capability including 300Ah of lithium power, four 180W solar panels and a 3000W inverter all managed by a Redarc Redvision Total Vehicle Management system.

Inside is where the C16 shines with a massive 'presidential' sized bed, comfortable dining area, innovative bathroom with shower and toilet, internal kitchen and huge windows which bring the outside in and enhance the sense of space in this relatively compact package.

The C16 has innovation in spades. When designing it, Cub wanted it to resemble a hotel room on wheels and they certainly achieved that aim. Step into the C16 and there is an instant wow factor, from the specialised fabric walls by Zush, large windows which let the outside in, 'presidential' sized king bed with pillowtop mattress to the smart TV, internal and external kitchens and more.

The bathroom is a combination shower, toilet and vanity, but it is remarkably spacious for a van of this size. A large window and roof hatch provide light and ventilation, there is a soap and shampoo holder, stainless steel sink and toilet roll holder and innovative flooring which resembles the eco-type recycled decking material. It allows for better drainage, keeps the floor of the shower clean and can be easily removed when cleaning is required.

I also liked the placement of QR codes externally on both the rear and offsides for easy access to all the C16 manuals should you need quick and easy access to them.



RIGHT The Cub C16 is designed for the adventure-seeking couple who still want to enjoy a bit of luxury

CUB C16

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Internal body length 4.8m (16ft)
Overall length 7.53m (24ft 8in)
External body width 2.23m (7ft 4in)
Travel height 3.01m (9ft 10in)
Internal height 1.97m (6ft 5in)
Tare 2207kg (2100kg as standard)
ATM 2700kg
Payload 493kg (600kg as standard)
Ball weight 216kg (175kg as standard)

EXTERNAL

Structure Fibreglass composite with XPS foam insulation
Cladding No, but has stainless steel wall protection
Chassis BlueScope galvanised steel
Suspension AL-KO Enduro X
Coupling AL-KO 50mm ball hitch (free option for DO35)
Brakes 12in electric
Wheels 17 x 8.5 5/150 and 35 Black Alloy Advanti Predator 5 Red, 265/65R17 BF Goodrich Km3 M/T Tyres
Water 200L freshwater capacity, 100L grey water
Battery 300Ah lithium battery
Solar 720W solar generation
Air-conditioner Rooftop Truma
Gas 2 x 4kg
Sway control AL-KO and Bosch Tow Assist – ABS and Sway Mitigation System

INTERNAL

Cooking Smev stainless steel sink with glass lid, Smev stainless steel stove – three burners, pantry, fridge box and slide, mixer tap, Ezy Clean kitchen top, external fridge storage
Fridge Dometic Coolmatic CRX 110C – 110L
Microwave 900W microwave
Bathroom Internal and external shower, removable floor mat, mirror, mixer tap, roof vent – Fantastic 12V, stainless steel sink
Washing machine N/A
Hot water Truma Combi D6 (Diesel) heater/hot water

PRICE FROM $129,990

OPTIONS FITTED

- Manual step
- Two fans
- Off-grid pack (2 x additional 150Ah lithium batteries, additional 180W solar panel, additional portable 180W solar panel)

PRICE AS SHOWN $135,700

MORE INFORMATION

Cub Campers
P: (02) 8838 8600
E: sales@cubcampers.com.au
W: cubcampers.com.au

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CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The underside of the chassis; The innovative and stylish bathroom; Plenty of external storage up front

TIM VAN DUYL
CARAVAN WORLD CREATIVE DIRECTOR

With 200L of freshwater, a couple should see about five days of heavy usage or around seven with more considered but comfortable use. Is that enough? I think it is as you're likely to want to resupply the fridges in that period so a quick stop at the visitor information centre for a refill (remember to say thanks!) is likely. If you did find a spot you wanted to hold a bit longer, you could use jerry cans, of course.

The 720W of solar matches the 300Ah of lithium well. You should see up to 40A coming in on an OK day which over the course of five hours could see half of the capacity replenished, that's plenty. Should you choose to run the Truma AC off the 3000W inverter, expect it to draw around 750W (62A at 12V) which will allow for a few hours of running without real concern and with only some cooking and the hot water service using gas, expect to rarely have to swap out the two 4kg gas bottles.

Wow. Cub has blown it out of the water in its first attempt at a hybrid caravan. Maybe it is because they have no heritage to follow, meaning the design really could be a true clean sheet, but it is amazing. The use of felted fabric lining on the walls adds a softness and warmth that should be more common and underneath, again, wow.

Cub builds everything from the chassis to cutting its own wall panels and it's all flawless. The use of AL-KO Enduro-X suspension is nice to see and the brakes, wheels and even tyres are good quality items. There does not appear to be any cost-cutting in the C16.

Cub has one of the more comprehensive warranty booklets and support structures I've seen. It has dealers almost nationwide and a team in the NSW-based factory to answer calls and emails. Offering a five-year warranty on the chassis, suspension and overall structure, along with three years on the OEM components, is also towards best in the industry.

BUILD QUALITY ★

"Cub has blown it out of the water in its first attempt at a hybrid caravan"

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JOHN FORD *EDITOR-AT-LARGE*

When Cub moved into the full-height hybrid caravan market, it maintained the genuine offroad DNA of the tried-and-true camper range that has kept them on track in the very competitive local camper and hybrid market for more than 50 years. I deliberately emphasise 'true offroad' because the term is widely bandied around in the RV sector. But can you really get an oversize and very weighty van into remote spots down narrow muddy tracks where deep washaways impede progress? The answer might be yes, but only with a bit of trouble, some time-consuming recoveries and expensive repairs.

The compact footprint, narrow track, single axle and moderate weight of the C16 means it's pretty nimble compared to a big van, so winding your way into the camp is less intimidating. The standard 2100kg tare weight can be maxed out with a 600kg payload to 2700kg, so most twin cabs and mid-range 4WDs can easily cope. Importantly, it's a perfect match for a Prado or a similar wagon-style option.

Our tow vehicle for the drive section of our review was a 200 Series LandCruiser, and it had us moving with ease up the steep mountains behind Healesville, and we saw no sway or pitching from the well-balanced outfit. We took it easy coming down, and the single-axle brakes brought us to a safe stop when needed. The light weight of the Cub also makes a lot of sense for towing over long distances because fuel usage will be less of a concern, so all in all, I gave the C16 full points in this section.

Cub entered the caravan scene late in the game, and it arrived with fresh ideas on how a van should look and behave inside. The Cub team suggested it wanted a full-height hybrid that would impress with the ambience of a quality hotel suite, and it succeeded. You move from a conservative exterior to a tasteful and very welcoming living space. The beige upholstered walls soften the impression beautifully, and I suspect they also muffle the outside noises. The two extra-large windows on each side are the biggest available, and they maximise the light and aspect for a feeling of being embedded in your surroundings.

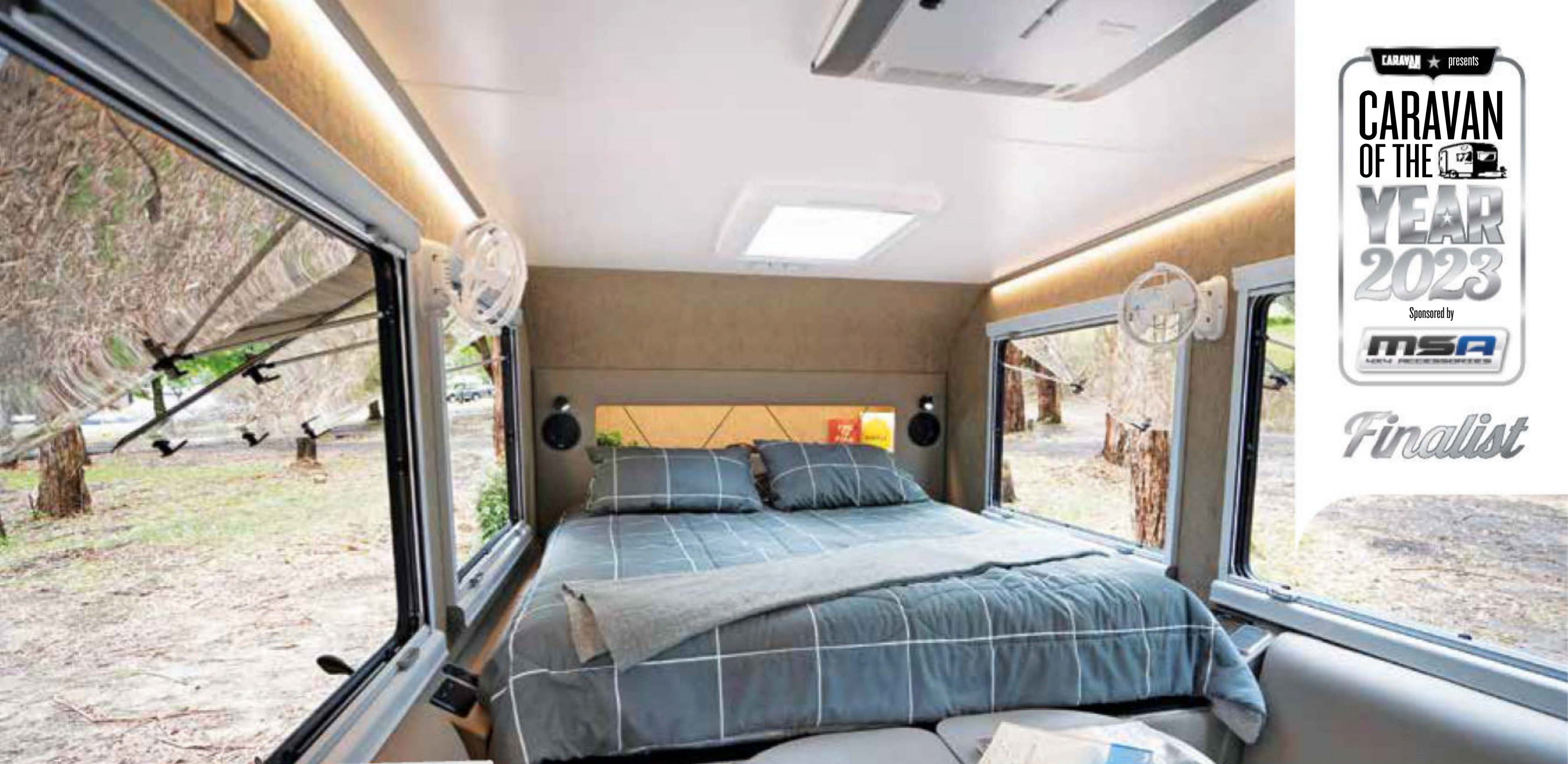
Many who say they dislike a combination shower and toilet might be converted by this one because there's room to move and decent ceiling height. Lounges on each side are positioned to take in the view opposite, and a pair of swivel tables rotate into an endless variety of functional positions. They call the bed 'presidential' in the brochure, and it's not an exaggeration because it truly is roomy and comfortable. The kitchenette has the basics, with most cooking concentrated outside, but the 3000W inverter will power up induction cookers and the essentials for breakfast or a late-night cuppa.

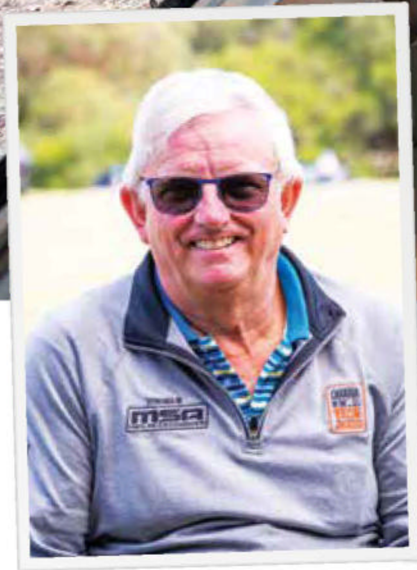
The C16 is available in two other layout designs; a bunk layout perfect for the whole family, or single bed options that wins you an additional robe between the beds.

ABOVE The C16 was towed with ease by a 200 Series in the mountains behind Healesville, Vic

TOWABILITY ★

"The compact footprint, narrow track, single axle and moderate weight of the C16 means it's pretty nimble"





ABOVE Presidential is an apt description of this bed setup

VALUE FOR MONEY ★

"With large windows on both sides at bed level, it is not hard to imagine being at some remote campsite and taking in the morning view without getting out of bed"

MALCOLM STREET
CARAVAN WORLD FIELD EDITOR

With a price tag close to $140,000 with options, the Cub Campers' C16 is certainly not a budget hybrid van. Having an internal length of just 4.8m (16ft), it's not a particularly large van either. If valuing a caravan on the amount of interior space, a cursory glance might suggest that there's not much bang for your buck, but a closer inspection reveals something very different.

Cub Campers has been around for a long time, mainly in the camper trailer market, but there's still plenty of experience gained from that. That shows in the build quality and layout of this 4.8m (16ft) hybrid. It's packed with features – everything from the Rimex-finished external kitchen to the different but effectively styled bathroom that works well in a relatively confined space. Only visible from the outside is the entire composite body (no timber) with fibreglass sandwich panel walls and a roof that is 30mm thick and the floor an extra 20mm thicker again. To make things neat inside, the panels are made with a wiring conduit already installed.

A feature that's hard to go past is the bed that takes up most of the front area. With large windows on both sides at bed level, it is not hard to imagine being at some remote campsite and taking in the morning view without getting out of bed. Those same windows result in an excellent space perception in a relatively small area. Lifting the bed reveals a few secrets, mainly the different style of under-bed storage – optional zipped bags that keep things reasonably clean. Although the internal kitchen is relatively small, the external one easily makes up for it. When getting away from it all, there's plenty of battery and solar panel capacity for good off-grid capability.

Another factor in the value-for-money equation is the price of a tow vehicle. Given the ATM of just 2700kg and payload of 600kg, the C16 won't require a heavy-duty tow vehicle at all. If prepared for lightweight travel, there's no reason why a vehicle with a tow rating of just 2500kg couldn't be used to tow this van. Just a thought.

Pinning down the X-factor of the C16 is problematic, not because there needs to be more choice but because there's too much. I've already mentioned some of the notable features, but I could go on about the electrical capacity or the custom-made water tanks. However, the X-factor is the C16 itself. It's different from everything else at COTY, a very distinctive van that stands out in a crowd despite its relatively small stature.

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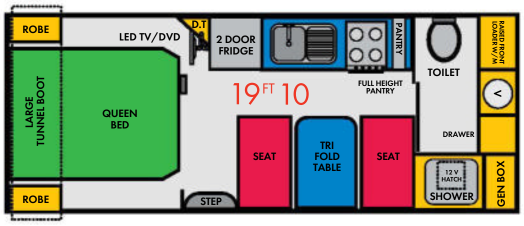
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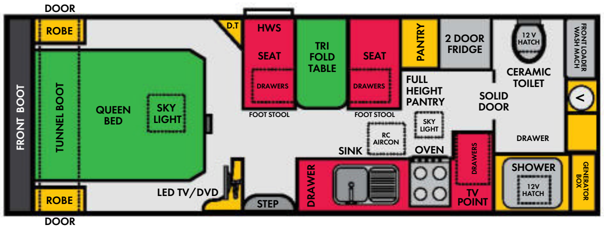
DOOR
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FOOT STOOL
FOOT STOOL
PANTRY
2 DOOR FRIDGE
12 V HATCH
CERAMIC TOILET
FRONT LOADER WASH MACH
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First stop after picking up the van

Second the start of the Gibb River Road

Set up at Windjana Gorge

Peter & Kerryn

Bushmaster Off Road Caravan

"We picked up our Bushmaster on the 14th February 2012. (Happy Valentines Day) The gift that keeps on giving. This was our first Caravan and Terry's advice, and knowledge was fantastic. We have travelled 1000's of kilometers throughout Australia, both on and off road. Terry is still available for a chat, anytime. We did the Gibb River Road without any problem. Nothing moved in the caravan and we never take down the TV. We receive lots of positive comments about the decal down the sides. Thank you, Terry, for all your guidance and after sale service that continues today."

Mark & Sally
"This is our 2nd Bushmaster. Terry is great to us and Bushmaster is great"

Milton & Jenny
"We have had 2 Bushmasters. 1st one in 2013 Bluegum, then 2017 model Ironbark"

Robin & Jan
"Our 2015 Bushmaster is comfortable and confident in all conditions. Terry's support is real and wonderful"

Peter & Belinda
"This is our 3rd Bushmaster since 2008 and we love them all"

Lois & Chris
"Custom design, our 2nd Bushmaster since 2012"

Viv & Pam
"Our 2011 Bushmaster is still like new, thanks Terry"

Des & Carrol
"Our ultimate outback is fantastic inside and out, the D-Max handles it easy"

BEAUTY BEYOND COMPARE

Only a short drive from Melbourne, the Yarra Valley and Dandeong Ranges offer a treasure trove of experiences, including quality local food and wine, breathtaking scenery, romantic hideaways and indulgent adventures.

Words *Julija Zivanovic* **Pics** *Supplied*

Just an hour east of Melbourne is the delight that is the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. With its rolling mountains and towering rainforests, entering the Dandenong Ranges can feel like you've been transported to a scene from *Lord of the Rings*. The lush, green paradise with a peaceful ambiance makes it hard to believe it's less than an hour from the hustle and bustle of Melbourne. Next door, the Yarra Valley is equally as beautiful, featuring rolling emerald hills dotted with more than 80 wineries. Take a deep dive with us into the various activities and attractions at the Yarra Valley, where you'll quickly realise that you need several days to fully experience everything it has to offer.

> “The most spectacular part of the region has to be *the 80 or so wineries perched upon green hills with sprawling vineyards and stunning architecture*”

LEFT AND ABOVE Yarrawood Estate; Hot air ballooning

The Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges is known for its gourmet food, award-winning wines and breathtaking nature walks. If you live in Melbourne, you’re likely familiar with the wide array of things to see and do in this area. Offering city-slickers a sanctuary away from the busy city, the Yarra Valley is a popular spot among locals and tourists alike. And once you discover everything this region has to offer, you’ll understand why. So, drink it in at world-famous cellars and distilleries, cycle the winding roads and endless mountain bike tracks or just lose yourself among the towering trees, creek beds and sunlit clearings.

Due to the popularity of the region, an insider’s tip is to visit during the week, as the weekends can be booked out months in advance and attract more expensive accommodation rates due to the high demand. Not to mention, you have a better chance of getting into your favourite cafe or restaurant!

WINERIES AND DISTILLERIES

The most spectacular part of the region has to be the 80 or so wineries perched upon green hills with sprawling vineyards and stunning architecture. Some of the big names include Domaine Chandon, where the famous Chandon sparkling wine is made, De Bortoli Wines, Innocent Bystander, Hubert Estate and Yering Station – just to name a handful. Many of the wineries feature farm-to-table restaurants and offer informative wine tastings.

And if wine isn’t your tipple of choice, there’s the famous Four Pillars Distillery in Healesville, offering the country’s number one craft spirit, Four Pillars Gin. Or Coldstream Brewery, offering beer and cider tastings, locally sourced food, special short-run seasonal release beers and much more.

TOP TRAILS

Due to the fertile soil and wet weather, the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges is home to a number of farms and orchards. Luckily, many of these places offer a pick-your-own-fruit experience. The U-Pick Trail is a series of farms offering visitors the opportunity to pick fresh, in-season fruit to take home for better than reasonable

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Kangaroo Ridge Retreat; Enjoy a glass of wine paired with delicious food at one of the 80 wineries in the region; A locally sourced spread

prices. A whole day can be dedicated to picking juicy berries, truffles and more, but check in advance as to what's in season.

The trail includes a number of participating growers, including Blue Hills Berries & Cherries, Cherryhill Orchards, Jay Berries, Kookaberry Strawberry Farm, Oasis Berry Farms, Rayner's Orchard, The Orchard at Montague, Summerberries Blueberry Farm, Truffle Valley, Wandin Valley Farms, Wandin Yallock Farms, Yarra Valley Cherries, Yarra Valley Dairy and Gateway Yarra Valley. More information about the trail can be found at www.visityarravalley.com.au/trails/u-pick-trail.

Another fun way to see the region is to walk, bike or road trip the Wander to Warburton Trail. Enjoy amazing food and drinks in award-winning places or check out the secret nature spaces along Warburton Highway. You could easily spend a day or three visiting the cafes, vineyards, orchards, bakeries and much more on this tree-lined trail.

If you love exercising, you can't come to the Dandenong Ranges without doing the famous 1000 Steps Walk (The Kokoda Track Memorial Walk). The steps wind up the hill through lush rainforest, and while it can be a gruelling slog to the top, it is definitely worth it once you see the view and breathe in the fresh mountain air.

DIVINE DINING

There's no shortage of gourmet restaurants in the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. With many of the restaurants and cafes sourcing local produce for their dishes, and some even from their own gardens, sitting down to lunch or dinner in one of these places is an experience in itself.

> "You'll quickly realise *you'll need several days to fully experience everything the Yarra Valley has to offer*"

ABOVE AND BELOW Lush ferns populate the region, including the iconic Black Spur Drive; Crossing the famous Monbulk Trestle Bridge

Some of the noteworthy restaurants include the extravagant Levantine Hill in Coldstream, 1309 at Balgownie Estate, Eleonore's Restaurant – where you can dine in a 19th century chateau – and The Stables at Stones. But remember to book in advance as spots can fill up fast, especially on the weekends.

And if it's coffee and a more casual bite you're searching for, there are dozens of quirky cafes to choose from in the region. The locals say you can't go past Round Bird Can't Fly in Lilydale and Miss Marple's Tearoom in Sassafras (you have to try their famous fluffy scones).

WHERE TO STAY

The Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges offers a wide array of accommodation options, from lovely camping and caravan sites where you can feel enveloped by the beautiful surrounds, to chateaus and boutique hotels for those without a caravan or camper handy.

Lilydale Pine Hill Caravan Park is the perfect base to set yourself up for an extended exploration of the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. The park offers a range of accommodation options, including plenty of RV friendly sites (powered, unpowered, drive through and ensuite). All RV sites are pet friendly. The park also offers a pay six-stay seven deal, ensuring you have plenty of time to explore all the nearby attractions, with the choice of self-drive or guided tours, public transport, cycling, canoeing or walking.

Nestled among the rolling hillsides of Healesville, the Big4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park is not one to be missed. Set up camp surrounded by the towering gum trees or by the lake, or for those without a caravan or camper, you can test out the modern cabins, studios or glamping pods. The park offers a large range of amenities to keep the whole family busy or wander into the surrounding area and explore attractions such as the Healesville Sanctuary, the Puffing Billy Railway, or appreciate the Yarra Valley from a different angle with Global Ballooning. Park Lane Holiday Park was also the proud host of Caravan of the Year 2023, and the judges, photographers and organisers spoke only praise about the hospitality and ambiance of this wonderful park.

There are plenty of caravan parks ready where you can set up your base camp to explore the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges, and a comprehensive list can be found online at www.visityarravalley.com.au/stay/caravan-camping.

Whether you're looking for an activity-filled adventure or a tranquil time to just sit and relax, the Yarra Valley is best explored over several days, and with dozens of caravan parks ready to welcome you into this beautiful region, there's really no excuse.

CONTACTS

Lilydale Pine Hill Caravan Park
105 Warburton Hwy,
Lilydale Vic 3140
P: (03) 9735 4577
W: www.lilydalepinehill.com.au/

BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park
419 Don Rd,
Healesville Vic 3777
P: (03) 5962 4328
W: www.parklaneholidayparks.com.au/yarravalley/

MAIN Hamelin Bay (Image Tourism WA)

WHERE TWO OCEANS MEET

Seize the seas when visiting the Margaret River region's most southern town, Augusta.

Words JULIA D'ORAZIO *Pics* JULIA D'ORAZIO AND SUPPLIED

Western Australia's Augusta can feel like being at the world's end. Located 315km south of Perth, Augusta is the springboard to the continent's southern-west tip. It is where two oceans – the Indian and Southern – converge. Ever watching the collision course of two roaring seas is Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse: the tallest lighthouse in mainland Australia.

Indeed, Augusta is moving on many fronts. But the towering lighthouse is not the only thing that guards the coasts. And those oceans are not the only waterways that thrill. The quiet seaside town of 1400 entices a life by the sea in other ways, making it an extraordinary GPS coordinate to visit.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUGUSTA

I was expecting to be shivering cold, being so south, but the sun gods looked down at Augusta in late April. Blue skies, the sun was shining; the air was fresh apple crisp. I just arrived after passing through the Boranup Forest along Bussell Highway. The enchanting one-hour drive connects Margaret River to Augusta, winding through karri woodlands that soar over 50 metres.

Stepping out, I quickly realised that being outdoors is a way of life in Augusta. The beautiful hamlet is sandwiched between national parks, Leeuwin-Naturaliste and Scott, and scenic waterways: the oceans, Flinders Bay and its inner water playground and Hardy Inlet – the mouth of the Blackwood River. The 270km-long river is Western Australia's longest continually flowing river, much of it fringed by wilderness.

Speaking of duration, Augusta is the state's third-oldest settlement, established two years after Perth in 1830 to claim the corner from French interest. However, the Dutch were the first Europeans who sighted the continent's southwestern tip in March 1622 and called it 'Landt van de Leeuwin,' meaning the land of the lioness. It has also been suggested that the town was named after the ship *Leeuwin*, which reached Batavia in 1622 (now modern-day Jakarta). Two centuries later, in 1801, during his circumnavigation of Australia, explorer Matthew Flinders renamed the tip Cape Leeuwin.

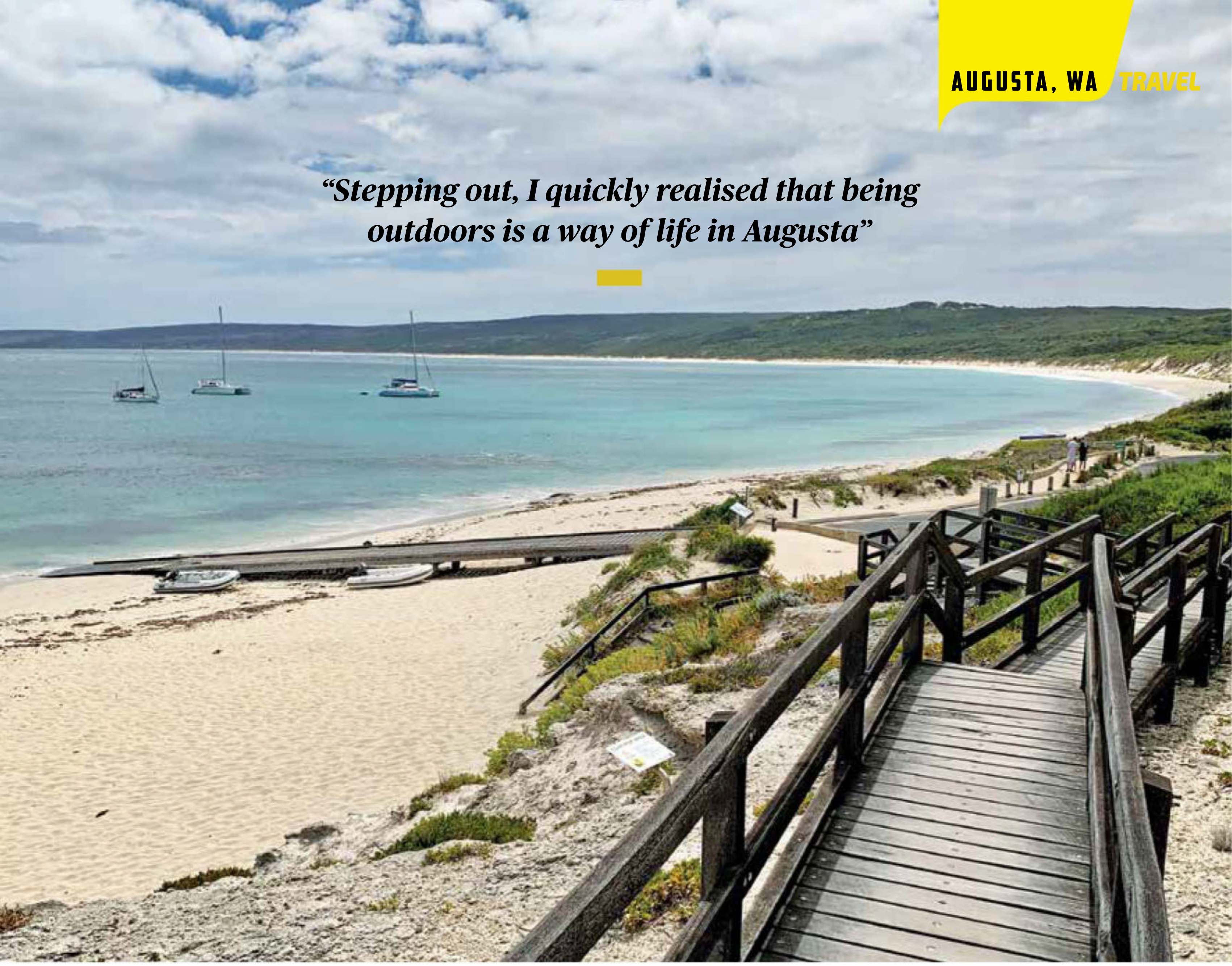
For more insight into the town's heritage, the Augusta Historical Museum is a great pitstop. The small museum celebrates the town's timber origins with a display of old woodworking tools and features an extensive shipwreck display. For truly unique viewing, there is a photographic exhibition recapturing the plight of 114 false killer whales that became stranded along the town's main beach in July 1986. The stranding attracted a massive community effort from across the region to save the whales, with 96 whales returning to sea.

Attracting whales to the coastline is more than just a once-off. Migrating humpback and southern right whales are spotted in Flinders Bay from mid-May to August. The bay is considered a 'resting point' for these ocean giants as they journey from Antarctica to warmer waters in the north. Multiple whale-watching tours are available to see their aqua aerobics at play.

◀ SOUTHERN OCEAN
INDIAN OCEAN ▶

TOP AND BOTTOM Ellis Street Jetty; The sign showing where two oceans meet

“Stepping out, I quickly realised that being outdoors is a way of life in Augusta”



ABOVE Hamelin Bay is one of Augusta's favourite waterways

A MODERN EXPLORATION

Besides grasping Augusta's history, it was time to get my bearings. Augusta River Tours runs two-hour scenic tours along the Blackwood River, guided by third-generation Augustan Graeme Challis. At $40 a pop, it's an inexpensive way to take stock of Augusta's pristine scenery.

The intimate boat tour departs from the 'Old Town Jetty' on Ellis Street. The jetty also lures avid anglers and is the launching pad for paddle pushers on kayaks and canoes. We bid farewell at 2pm, with Graeme wasting no time to launch into the telling of the region's ecosystem.

"We are sailing on black tea waters," Graeme said, noting the distinct dark brown river waters. Spotting wildlife is effortless. Over 60 bird species have been spotted in the lower section of the Blackwood River. Within moments of setting sail, we quickly passed a small sandbank crowded with sunbathing pelicans or what Graeme dubbed a “pelican party”. Gate-crashers to the pelican party included white-bellied pied cormorants and a lone black swan.

Besides wildlife flapping about, the only other movements came from seldom boats spotted here and there. My eyes were fixated on the forests fringing the waterway. Graeme soon alerted the entire boat to a white-bellied sea eagle – the second-largest bird of prey in Australia – clawing its feet onto a naked tree on nearby Thomas Island. It sensed our curiosity, soon unlatching its claws and flying off, its metre-plus wingspan appearing pterodactyl-like, casting its shadow flying over us – show off!

Moving through, we reached the shallowest part of the river, Hardy Inlet – a great spot to catch mullet and herring. A bit further on is Molloy Island. This island is a rarity in WA. Established in 1976, the 300-acre island – densely populated with jarrah, blackbutt, red gum, banksias and various native trees – has over 260 residential lots.

The public is not permitted to access the island community, with locals only able to use the island's ferry crossing. Many of us onboard envied their tranquil lives in a comfortable commune in the thick of nature. The sentiment was reinforced by seeing kids swinging off a rope along the riverbanks, making a splash on their doorstep – such is the simple life.

It's possible to get a taste of what's it like to live on Molloy Island with the namesake Molloy Caravan Park opposite the mainland. It's here where the boat turned around, journeying back to town. Graeme proved again that he has a keen eye, spotting an osprey perched in a paperbark tree along the inlet banks.

We sailed past a bopping precession of black swans, then soon saw another cluster in the distance – the weekly sail regatta. Several gusty white sails dotted the river, with the Leeuwin Naturaliste Ridge rising in the distance. Karri trees stood like sparse hairs on the range. The scenescape a marvellous display of watercolours.

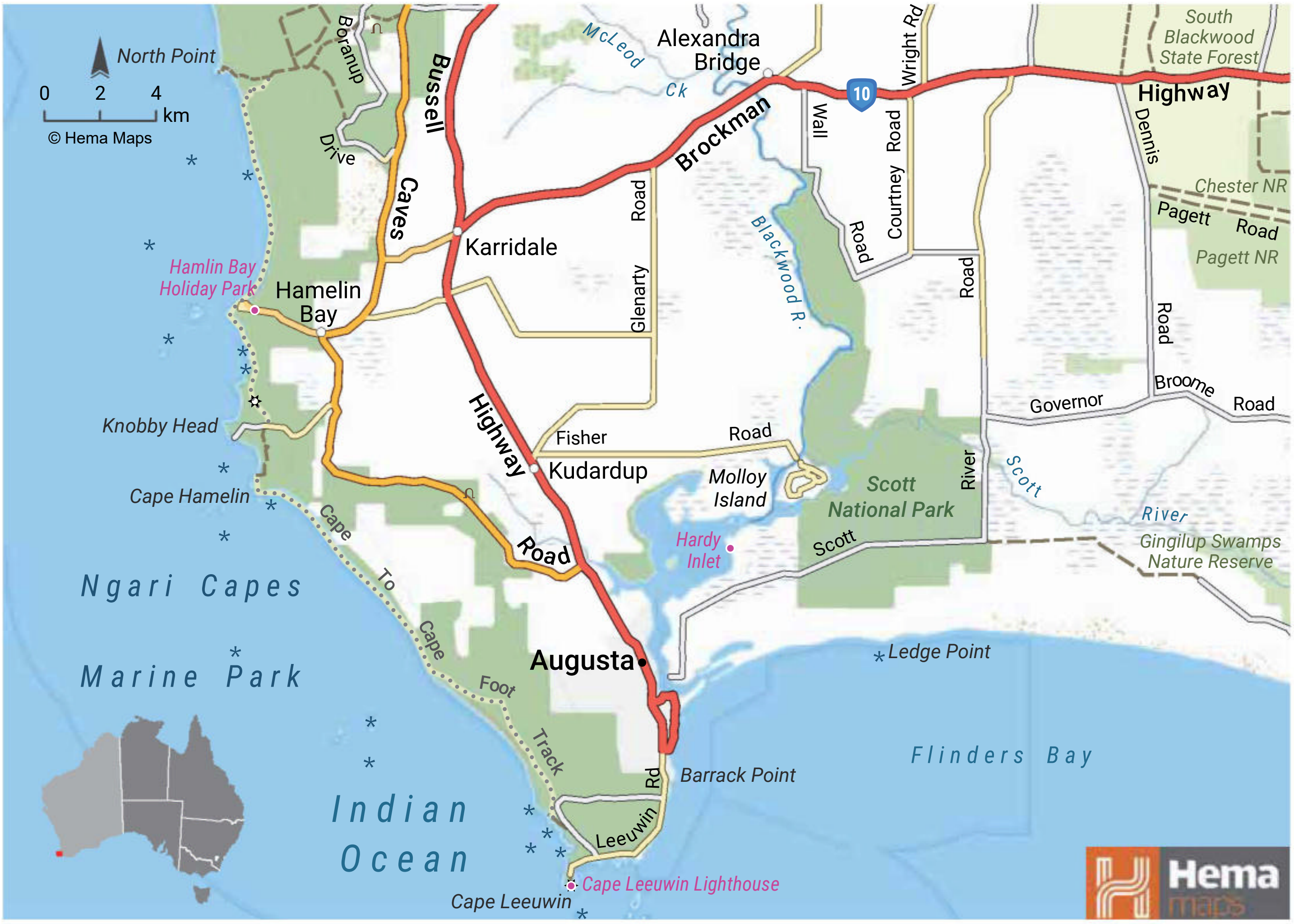
RIGHT Augusta River Tours departs from the Ellis Street Jetty

FAST FACTS

Hamelin Bay Holiday Park
- P: (08) 9758 5540
- E: bookings@hamelinbayholidaypark.com.au
- W: hamelinbayholidaypark.com.au

Augusta River Cruises
- P: 0409 377 809
- E: graeme@augustarivertours.com.au
- W: augustarivertours.com.au

Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse
- P: (08) 9757 7411
- E: info@capesfoundation.org.au
- W: margaretriverattractions.com/lighthouses/cape-leeuwin-lighthouse


North Point
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Boranup Drive
Caves Road
Bussell Highway
McLeod Ck
Alexandra Bridge
Brockman Highway
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Wall Road
Courtney Road
Wright Rd
South Blackwood State Forest
Dennis Road
Chester NR
Pagett Road
Pagett NR
Karridale
Glenarty Road
Blackwood R.
Road
Hamlin Bay Holiday Park
Hamelin Bay
Knobby Head
Cape Hamelin
Broome Road
Governor Road
Fisher Road
Kudardup
Molloy Island
Scott National Park
River Road
Scott River
Gingilup Swamps Nature Reserve
Hardy Inlet
Scott
Cape To Cape Foot Track
Ngari Capes Marine Park
Augusta
Ledge Point
Flinders Bay
Barrack Point
Leeuwin Rd
Indian Ocean
Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse
Cape Leeuwin
Hema maps

"Migrating humback and southern right whales are spotted in Flinders Bay from mid-May to August"

ABOVE Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse is well worth a visit

ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER

Two words of advice when visiting Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse: Bring the puffer jacket, and don't bother to spend time on your hair; all the effort it takes to look decent is gone into the wind.

The 32m tall lighthouse is at the crux of where two oceans meet. It's an incredible place to find yourself at this pointy end of the country, just 9km south of Augusta. Add a few thousand kilometres south to your journey, and you will arrive in Antarctica.

Commissioned by Premier Sir John Forrest, Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse was built in 1895 from local limestone to aid shipping between Fremantle and Albany. Its sister lighthouse, Cape Naturaliste, was built eight years later and is located 111km north. Both beacons are markers for the famous Cape to Cape coastal walking trail.

The lighthouse is more than just a glowing golden eye. It's an open-air museum with the Interpretive Centre housed within one of the former lighthouse keepers' cottages. If visiting on an extremely windy day, you'll find yourself running towards the centre and, perhaps, staying longer than intended. Inside, you'll brush up on all there is to know about lighthouses as well as this lighthouse's history and keeper alums through interactive displays.

I found my 'Dutch courage' to brace the wind factor and head towards the light. My hair rivalled a headbanging, long-haired rocker, thrown in all directions with every gust while walking along the peninsula. But there was respite, standing at the entrance of the lighthouse. To enter, you must hop on a guided tour to the top of the lighthouse, where double ocean views are guaranteed – a rare claim.

More hair-raising is coming back down from dizzying heights to witness the oceans' might. Under the lighthouse's shadow is a platform to see where the two oceans meet. A blue signpost directs each – the Southern Ocean on the left, the Indian Ocean on the right. Beyond the platform, a rugged outcrop gradually slopes down to the ocean. Giant waves pounded the coastline and made for a gnarly sight, spray taking flight with each coastal crash. Now that's metal.

> ***"Within a few minutes from our campsite, the rays appeared like black diamonds, hovering just metres from sandy toes"***

STINGRAY SIGHTINGS

It was a busy time with Augusta's three caravan parks booked out, so we opted to stay in nearby Hamelin Bay. Beachfront caravan park, Hamelin Bay Holiday Park, is 18km north of Augusta and offers unpowered and powered sites and multiple ablution blocks nestled among peppermint trees.

The popular caravan park is adjacent to the region's other famed coastal guard. Located within Ngari Capes Marine Park, Hamelin Bay is renowned for its patrolling stingrays, frequently spotted gliding along the coast.

Within a few minutes from our campsite, the rays appeared like black diamonds, hovering just metres from sandy toes. It's as if the rays are privy to a crowd closely monitoring their movements from shore, flapping part of their wings above water as if flirting with us onshore. Talk about a flip tease.

Besides famous rays, this coastal stretch is a great place to spot wildlife along the bay's elevated boardwalk. The bay's vodka-clear waters entice for a dip but be mindful of potential barbs! To swim, make a right along the beach, past the 1882-built Hamelin Bay jetty remnants to avoid patrolling rays.

RECOVERY SESSION

The town's main pub at Augusta Hotel Motel is like entering a time warp. Built in 1912, the hotel interior's dated fixings – diamond-patterned carpets and mustard walls and roofs – add to its old-fashioned charm. Over the years, the hotel has received extensions, making it a labyrinth to walk through.

Adding to its retro lure, the pub offers affordable eats, with some items priced as if sold two decades ago. (A massive bowl of chips for $7 did not go unnoticed by this writer!) But what else makes up for its dated designs is the hotel's location, two blocks from the river.

I sat along the outdoor decking to appreciate the town's vantage point. The pub sits hilltop, overlooking a field of green (perfect for lawn bowls), the Blackwood River and Flinders Bay. With the sun shining, it is a great spot to linger for hours, revel with locals and appreciate that 'the world's end' looks good here.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The beautiful Flinders Bay; Stingray at Hamelin Bay; Hamelin Bay jetty remnants

MAIN Camden Haven Inlet from North Brother Mountain

THE HAVENS: A PATCH OF PARADISE

Join Julie as she takes you through the best of The Havens in New South Wales, including the picturesque waterways and walks, the incredible places to eat and much more.

Words and Pics **JULIE IHLE**

ABOVE AND BELOW Camden Haven River; View from Dunbogan Boatsheds

On any given morning, if you walk along the breakwall towards North Haven Beach, you'll be greeted cheerily by fellow walkers and cyclists. North Haven – and the surrounding 'havens' of Camden Haven, West Haven, Dunbogan and Laurieton – is a friendly place. Blessed with natural beauty, cafes, parkland and surrounding mountains, it's really no wonder the people here are in a good mood.

Just 30 minutes south of Port Macquarie, 'The Havens' are dominated by the Camden Haven River and its tributaries, which interlace the small towns and hamlets. Standing sentinel over the region is North Brother Mountain, which has one of NSW's best coastal lookouts. With unspoilt beaches and waterways, forest walks, good fishing, national parks and plentiful cafes, it has the nostalgic charm of an old-school Aussie beach holiday and many love the area so much that they retire here.

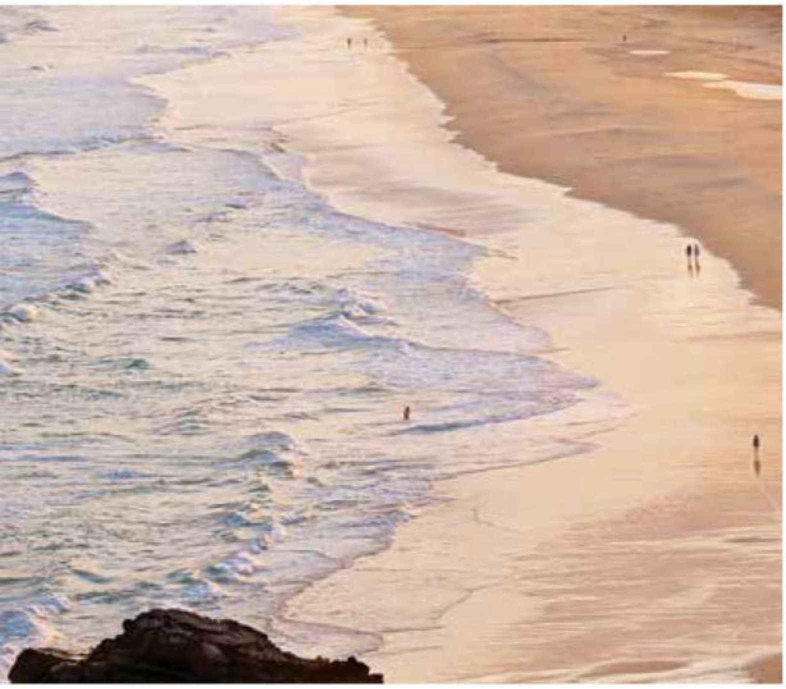
The area made headlines for all the wrong reasons back in March 2021 during the floods on the mid north coast of NSW. Happily, the area has now recovered and is back to welcoming visitors. With plenty of holiday parks with water frontage, whether you want a few days respite from the road or if you want to stay and explore the region for a while, The Havens has it covered.

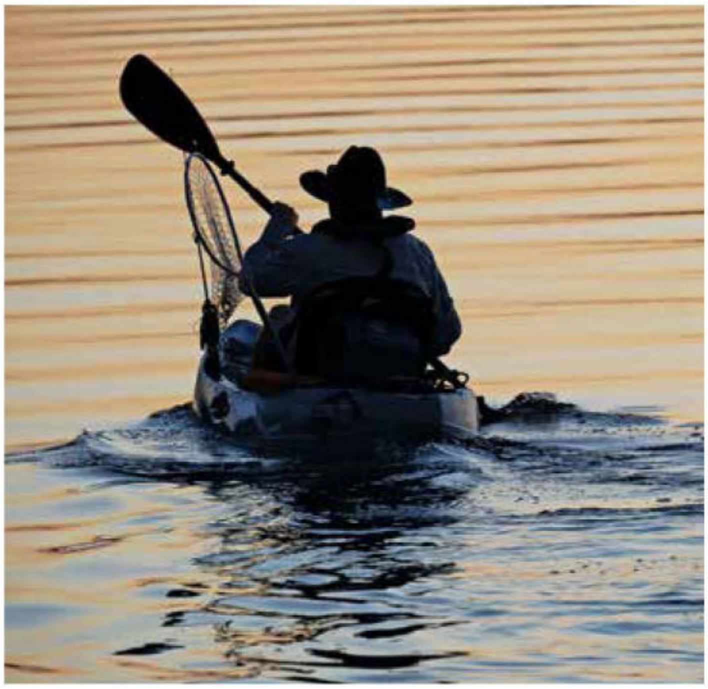
> *"With unspoilt beaches and waterways, forest walks, good fishing, national parks and plentiful cafes, it has the nostalgic charm of an old-school Aussie beach holiday"*

CAMDEN HAVEN

ABOVE AND BELOW You might be lucky enough to see dolphins; Rowers on the river

> *"This is a postcard-perfect stretch of sand with a surf life saving club and popular cafe"*





Waterways

Camden Haven delivers a big blue dose of serenity with its beaches, lakes, inlets and tributaries, so there's much to do on water.

Start your exploration at North Haven Beach, where the river meets the sea. This is a postcard-perfect stretch of sand with a surf lifesaving club and popular cafe. If you're after calmer waters, drive to Pilot Beach on the other side of the breakwater. It's the perfect place for splashing around or relaxing with a book.

Around the corner from Pilot Beach, you can kayak on Camden Haven Inlet, with kayak and stand-up paddle board hire available at Dunbogan. And never fear, if you prefer something more motorised, you can hire a tinny or barbecue boat.

A stone's throw from North Haven's cafe strip, Queens Lake is a lovely spot to take stock and enjoy the good life, whether for you that means picnicking, fishing, walking or photography. You might see glossy black cockatoos and swift parrots or if you're lucky, you might spy a koala.

A short drive north of Laurieton is Lake Cathie (pronounced lake cat-eye), a large saltwater lake. The warm shallow waters are ideal for swimming and it's definitely worth doing the short forest walk from the picnic area, which leads to a viewing platform with great lake and ocean views.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Hire a bike and cycling around; Dunbogan Beach; Twilight fishing

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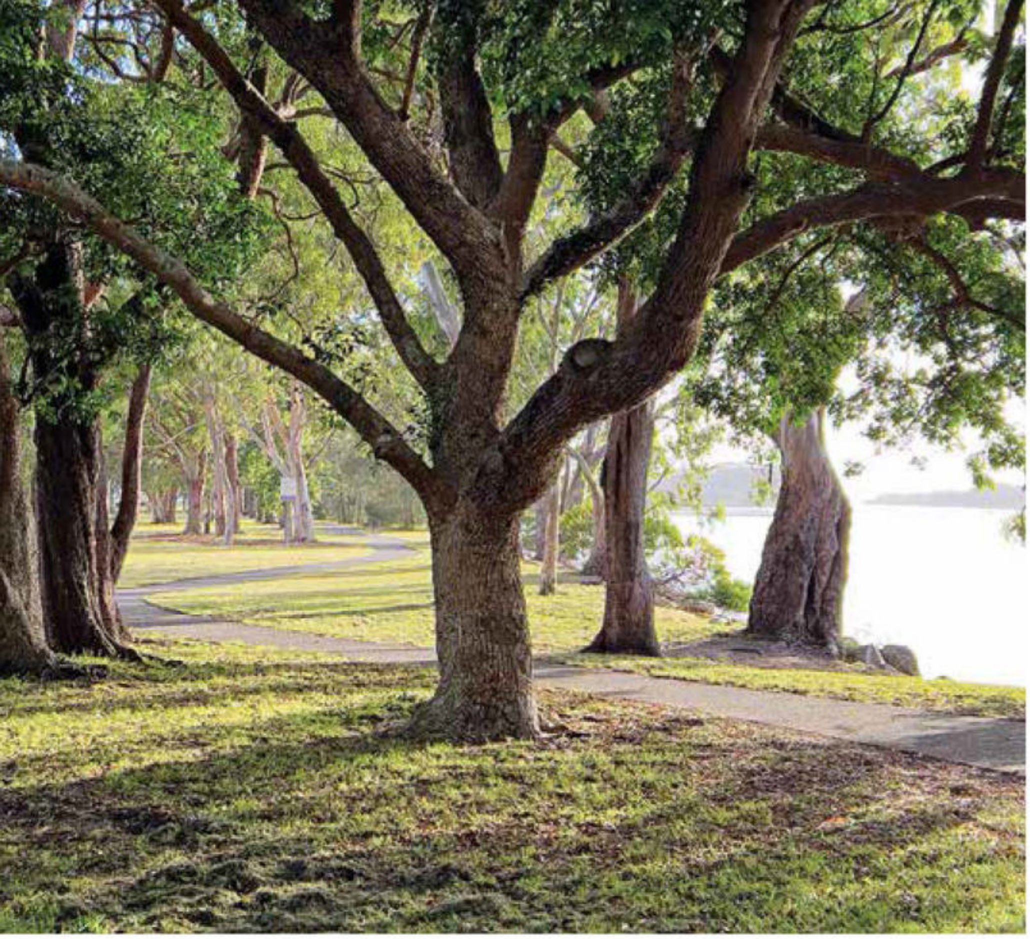


ABOVE Camden Haven River Walk

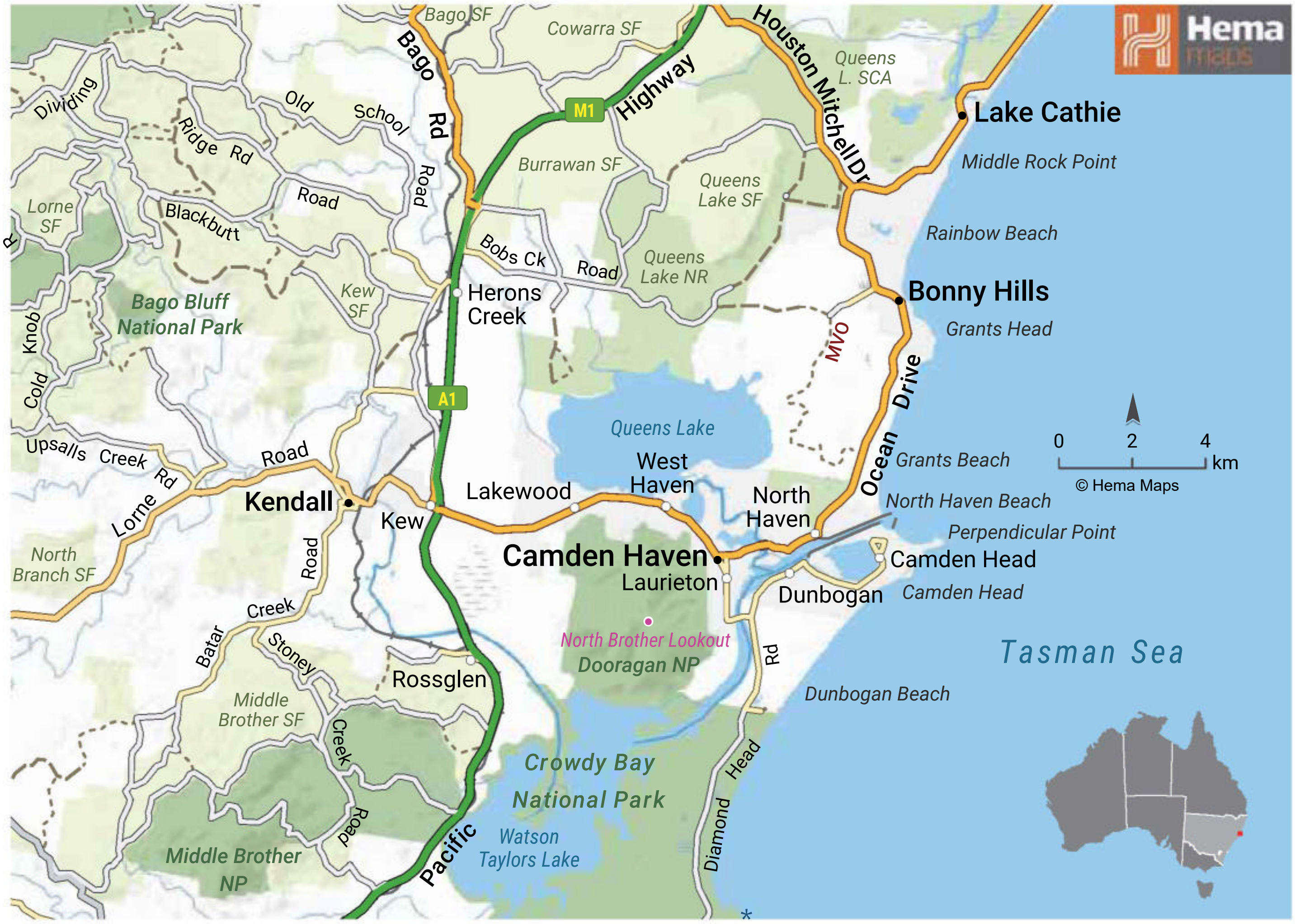
Walks

Not just a watery paradise, there's plenty to do on land. There's a good variety of walks from easy strolls to full-day hikes.

The best place to start is the Camden River Walk at North Haven. This 5.5km paved path runs from North Haven Surf Club to Apex Park in Laurieton alongside the Camden Haven Inlet. On the way, you'll pass public art, an exercise station, cafes, picnic grounds and gnarly mangroves. Sections of the walk are wheelchair and pram friendly. The beauty of this walk is you can walk as little or far as you want. On the weekend there's a steady stream of walkers, cyclists and dogwalkers, particularly near the beach, but during the week it's much quieter. Keep an eye out for dolphins while you walk!

Also starting at the surf club is the 7km return Grants Beach Walk, which passes through the sand dunes adjacent to Grants Beach. This is a flat walk through eucalypt, paperbark and banksia forest, but there are no facilities so you'll need to bring water.

Nearby Queens Lake offers flat walking on a 4.4km one-way walk with views of the lake


Hema maps
Bago SF
Cowarra SF
Bago Rd
M1
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Lake Cathie
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Old School Road
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Queens Lake SF
Lorne SF
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Queens Lake NR
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Kew SF
Herons Creek
Bonny Hills
Grants Head
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MVO
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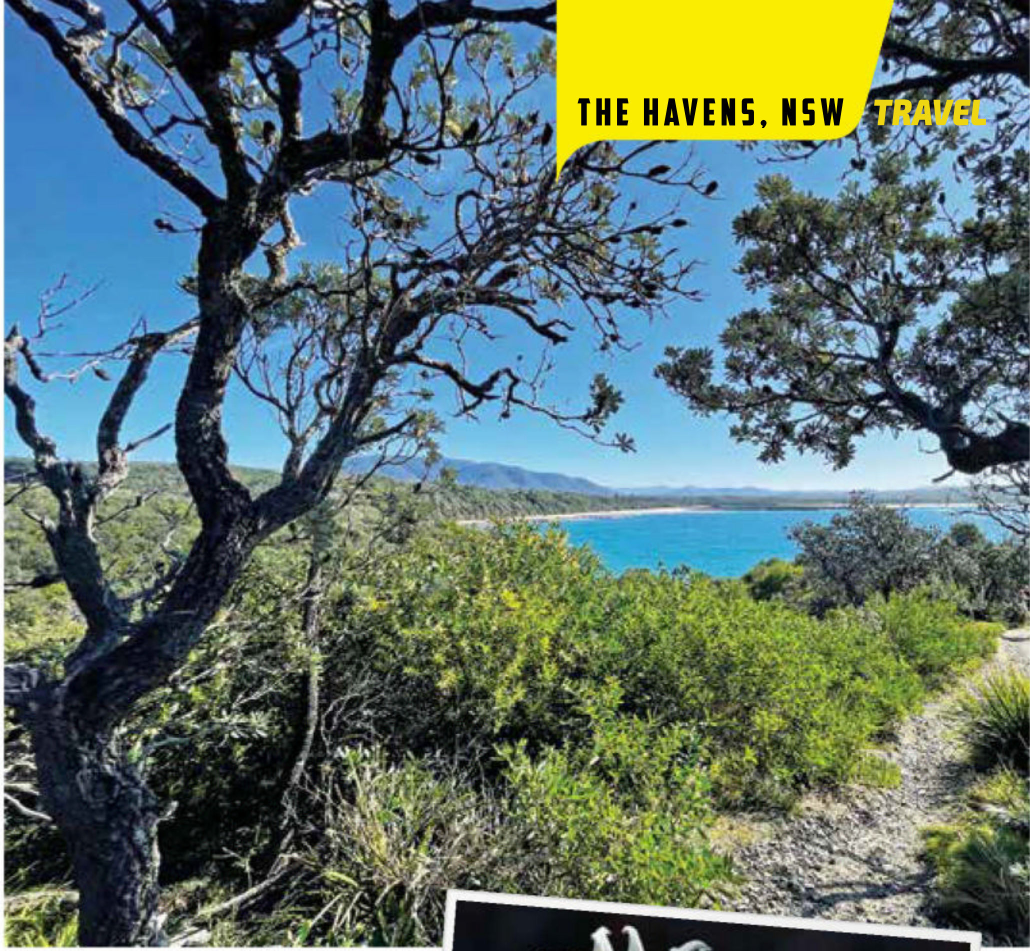
Camden Head
Creek
Batar
Stoney
North Brother Lookout
Dooragan NP
Rd
Tasman Sea
Rossglen
Middle Brother SF
Creek
Dunbogan Beach
Crowdy Bay National Park
Head
Road
Watson Taylors Lake
Diamond
Middle Brother NP
Pacific

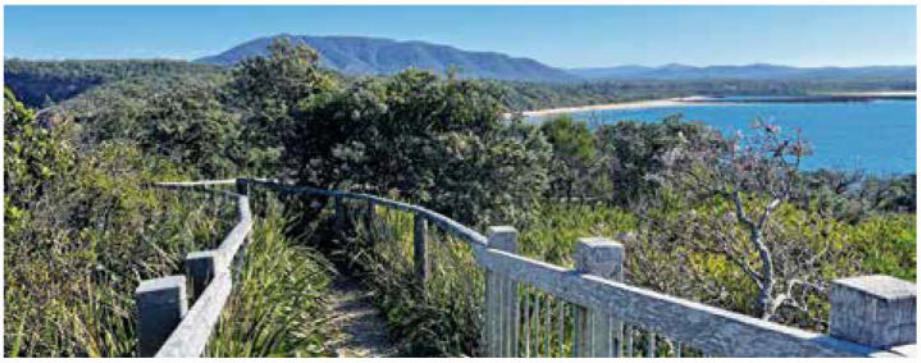
all the way. The walk starts at Henry Kendall Reserve, which has ample picnic grounds and barbecues, and there are a number of entry spots en route so you can pick and choose the section of the walk you'd like to tackle.

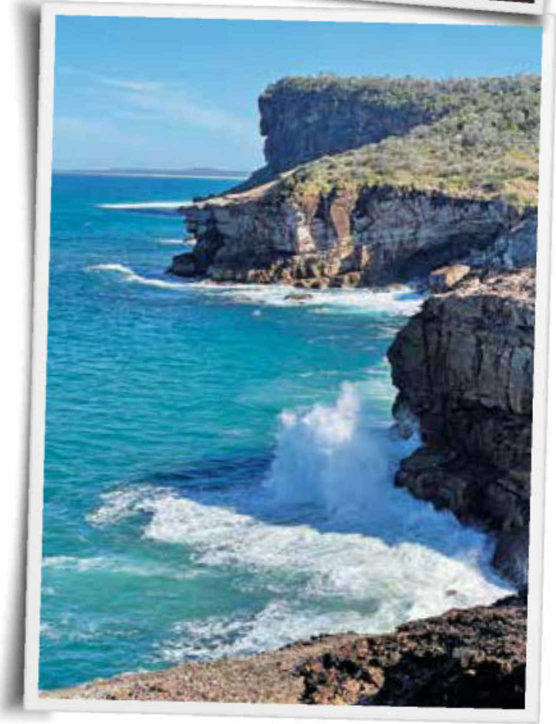
Some spectacular walking with not too much effort is to be had at Kattang Nature Reserve near Dunbogan. You can do the 2km Flower Bowl Circuit (best in late winter or spring for flannel flowers, orchids and boronia) or the slightly longer Perpendicular Walk. The name says it all – along the way you'll have jaw-dropping views of vertiginous cliff faces and sweeping coastal views and keep an eye out for whales from May to November.

North Brother in Dooragan National Park, accessible by car, offers panoramic views of Camden Haven all the way to Yarrahapinni in the north and Crowdy Head in the south and is a launching pad for paragliders. It offers an easy 500m rainforest loop – or the super fit can trek up the mountain on a 3km one-way thigh-burning slog.



> ***"Along the way you'll have jaw-dropping views of vertiginous cliff faces and sweeping coastal views"***





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Perpendicular Point Walk; Pelicans wait in hope; Perpendicular Walk; Kattang Nature Reserve; Spring flannel flowers along the track

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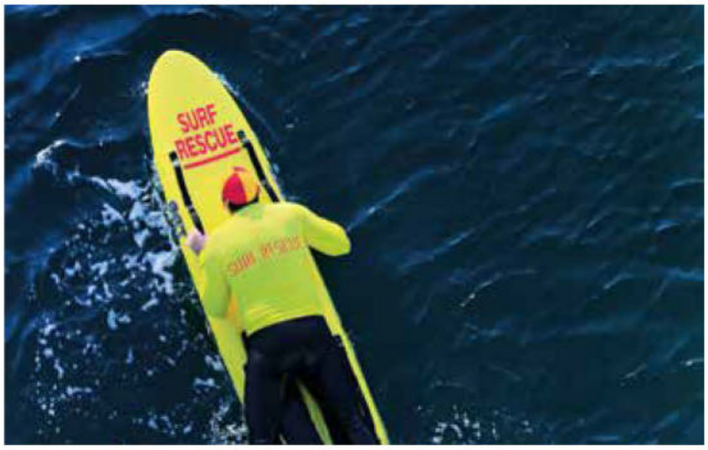


CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Laurieton's Plaza Theatre; A view of North Brother Mountain from the river; The region is a surfing mecca

What to do

Once you've had your fill of walking, water sports and lazy beach days, there are plenty of other activities.

Just out of town, the Plaza Theatre at Laurieton feels like going back to a time when going to the cinema was a big event. This cinema, dating from 1959, has been lovingly restored into a snazzy retro theatre with extravagant gold statues, vintage posters and a cute ticket office. It comes with its own film pedigree. Director Baz Luhrmann grew up in the area and first discovered his love of cinema here when his father worked as a projectionist. Today the cinema shows arthouse and latest release films.

Should you time your visit for December and January, head to the hills behind Laurieton to Brackenridge Berries for a spot of blueberry picking. After you've filled your bucket with juicy organic blueberries, make a beeline for Waitui Falls – a lovely waterfall and picnic spot and a favourite with photographers with a short loop trail.

For those with an arts bent, Crystalline Pottery Studio has a working studio, gallery and garden and it's a great place to pick up that special gift. Long Point Winery, just north of Laurieton, has an ever-changing arts display. Pack a picnic to enjoy in their grounds on the bespoke wooden deck overlooking the sculpture garden. And while you are there it would be rude not to taste the wines ($10 a tasting). Their refreshing alcoholic ginger beer is highly recommended!

North Haven is only a 30-minute drive north to the 'big smoke' of Port Macquarie. There you can enjoy cafe life, walk the breakwall or see a show at the acclaimed Glasshouse Theatre, widely regarded as one of regional Australia's best performing arts venues.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Hikers on North Brother Mountain; Beachside cafe at North Haven Beach; View from Charles Hamey Lookout

Where to eat

Starting at the beach, Beach Break Cafe at North Haven Beach does a great line in beachside treats – think quality burgers, wraps and toasties accompanied by sea views.

Of course, it wouldn't be an Aussie beach holiday without fish and chips, and Laurieton Seafoods is the real deal. Here you can enjoy fish and chips with a side order of local oysters overlooking Camden Haven Inlet on their new wharf, replete with picnic tables, or you can buy local fish to cook up a storm back at camp.

There's no shortage of cafes in the area, but the standouts are local favourite The Sandbar Cafe, which offers breakfast and lunch, and be sure to save room for their delectable range of homemade cakes (the key lime slice is quite sensational). A few doors down new kid on the block Moo and Bean Kitchen & Bar also runs all-day food with a slight Asian flavour (think pork belly with pickled ginger or crab rolls in miso mayo) and offers live music and oysters on Sundays in their big backyard festooned with fairy lights.

In the last few years, a range of eateries have sprung up in the main hub of Laurieton to suit all tastebuds – Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, burgers, as well as a large laid-back pub on the main street.

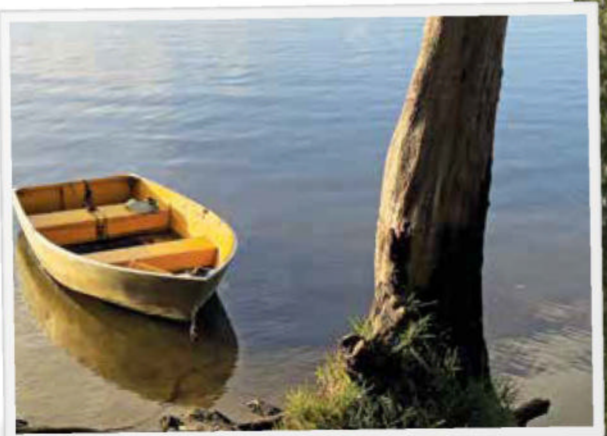
Originally built in the 1940s, Dunbogan Boatshed is a favourite with locals and tourists alike with its ever-so-cute wooden boatshed on the banks of the Camden Haven River with views of North Brother Mountain. It was badly damaged in the 2021 floods and at the moment is just doing coffees, so it's a case of watch this space.

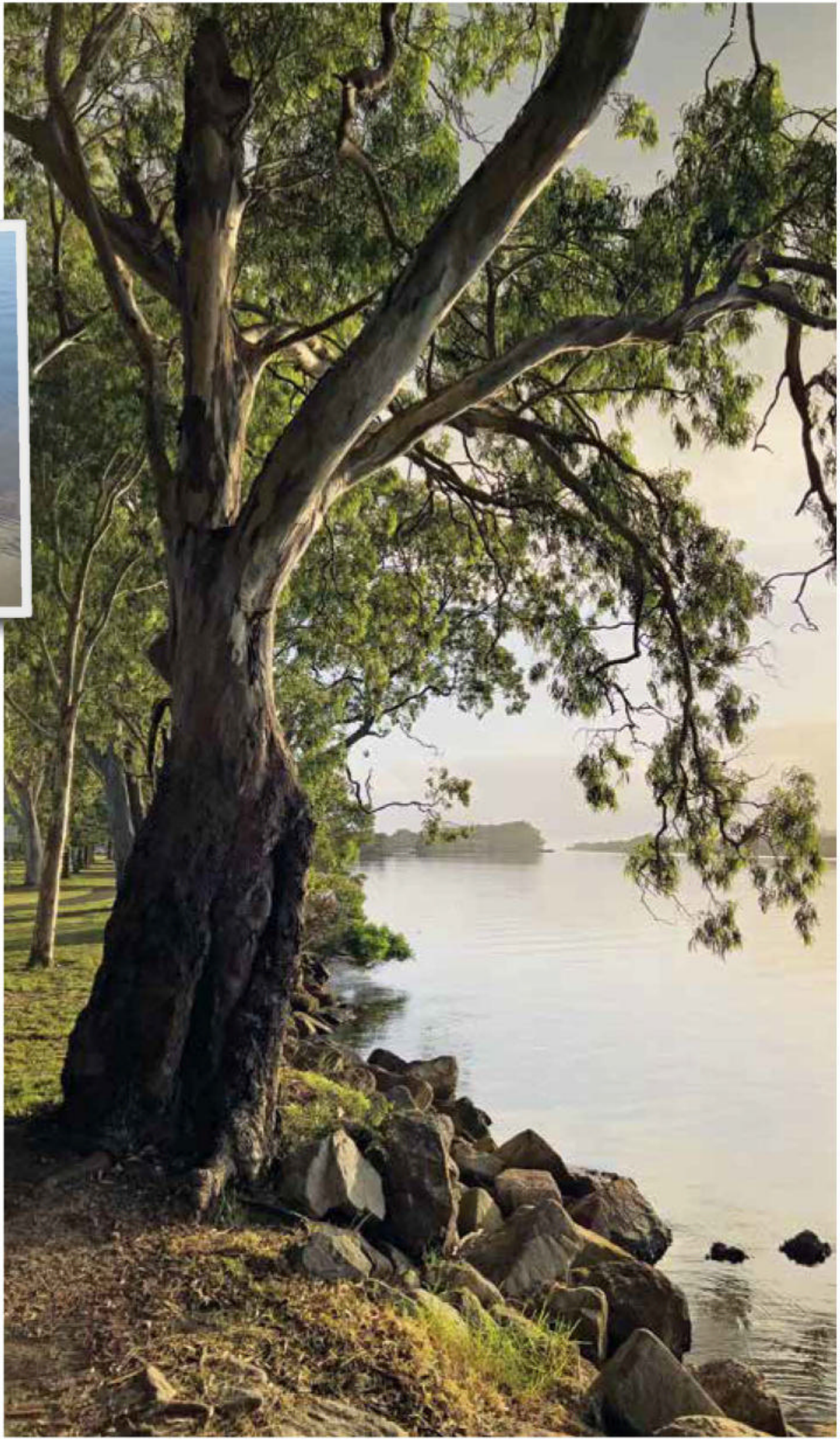
After a hiatus of a few years, the region's premier food festival, Slice of Haven, is firmly back on the agenda. Held in May, it is a celebration of local food and drink with live music and festivities. Whether you are a foodie or just love a party, it's definitely worth timing your visit for then.

> ***"It wouldn't be an Aussie beach holiday without fish and chips"***

CHARLES HAMEY LOOKOUT

North Brother Lookout might be the area's most popular lookout, but our tip is to also head to Charles Hamey Lookout. It has much easier access and offers fabulous beach and mountain panoramas just a few steps from the car park.





ABOVE AND LEFT The views from the Camden Haven River Walk; Boating haven

CARAVAN PARKS IN THE HAVENS

Reflections North Haven – in a prime position at North Haven Beach with cabins, powered and unpowered sites.
W: reflectionsholidayparks.com.au/park/north-haven

Jacaranda Holiday Park – powered sites and a range of cabin types close to the beach.
W: hampshireholidays.com.au/park/jacaranda-holiday-park

Brigadoon Holiday Park – situated in beautiful parkland with waterfront access.
W: brigadoonholidaypark.com.au

Dunbogan Caravan Park – powered sites and cabins by the Camden Haven River.
W: dunbogancaravanpark.com.au

Laurieton Lakefront – cabins and powered and unpowered sites at Queens Lake.
W: laurietonlakefront.com.au

Diamond Waters Caravan Park – powered and unpowered sites and cabins with water frontage and native bushland.
W: diamondwaterscaravanpark.com.au

Valley of Villages

Just 20 minutes inland from Laurieton, you will find rolling green hills and charming hamlets.

The Royal Hotel at Kew, dating from 1891, was once the stopping-off point for horse-drawn coaches from Taree to Port Macquarie, but today is worth stopping for a refreshing beer in the recently renovated hotel, which has been bought by two local families. Next door to the pub is The Retro Room and Qi Coffee for coffee, cake and a unique vintage find as well as The Squeaky Gate Farm Shop. The shop is based on the 'farm shop' concept in the United Kingdom and sells quality local and regional produce, dairy, refrigerated and frozen products, as well as artisan food items, homewares and giftware.

Poetry lovers should visit Kendall where there is a statue of poet Henry Kendall, who lived in the area for five years and loved the forest and river landscape. Kendall is also home to Miss Nellie's Cafe, a popular country-style bakehouse. It had considerable damage during the 2021 floods, and, at the time of writing, it is in the process of being rebuilt. In the meantime, there is a pop-up cake truck and cute garden serving Miss Nellie's delectable baked treats like raspberry ripple muffins. Yum!

> ***"The Royal Hotel at Kew, dating from 1891, was once the stopping-off point for horse-drawn coaches from Taree to Port Macquarie"***

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A BETTER RAM 1500?

Words **TIM VAN DUYL**

GM Specialty Vehicles recently invited us to the launch of the MY23 Silverado 1500 LTZ Premium and ZR2 and, in a surprise twist, we were greeted with a bevy of caravans to tow and a boat to boot.

Pics Tim van Duyl and supplied

IN BRIEF

Small updates and a new model headline the MY23 Silverado 1500

> "The Ram 1500 and Silverado 1500 *sold more than 500,000 units globally last year*"

ABOVE There is a swathe of towing tech in the Silverados

Maybe it's the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon or maybe it is just because they are so bloody good at towing, but I see Ram 1500s everywhere. At our recent Caravan of the Year shootout (read all about it in this issue and the next) we had no less than three arrive from dealers and manufacturers and on the road, I swear three in four big vans are towed by one.

I sort of get the appeal. They have high tow ratings, they are relatively affordable and even with their stonking V8s, they tend to do OK on fuel when hauling big vans (we've seen approximately 30L/100km several times on long tows) but it's not the only truck in town and its main rival has a lot to offer. Bring on the Silverado 1500.

WHAT WAS ON OFFER

A test drive with a tow! That's fairly unheard of with only Isuzu and its D-MAX and MU-X launched featuring some towing; otherwise, it is a rare pleasure at new-car launches.

We had two new 1500s, an updated LTZ Premium and new-spec ZR2, a nameplate not used for a long time but revered by offroad enthusiasts. The LTZ is the one that drew my attention the most. It is one of the top specifications offered by the factory with the local arm, GMSV, also ticking the 6.2L V8 and Z71 Off-Road Pack options on all coming our way.

The LTZ Premium features massive 20in wheels, a black leather-appointed interior, adaptive cruise control and a Technology Pack featuring additional cameras and a larger heads up display over lesser-spec'd models.

The camera angles available are impressive with no less than 14 angles on offer. There are six focused on towing, most of which require an optional camera system mounted to your trailer but what they can do is pretty cool. There is a transparent view that morphs a number of views together to virtually see through the trailer as well as an option to mount a camera to the rear of the trailer as a rear-view camera. Also notable is a front view activated at low speeds to see what is in front of the truck and four angles that will be handy for hitching and towing.

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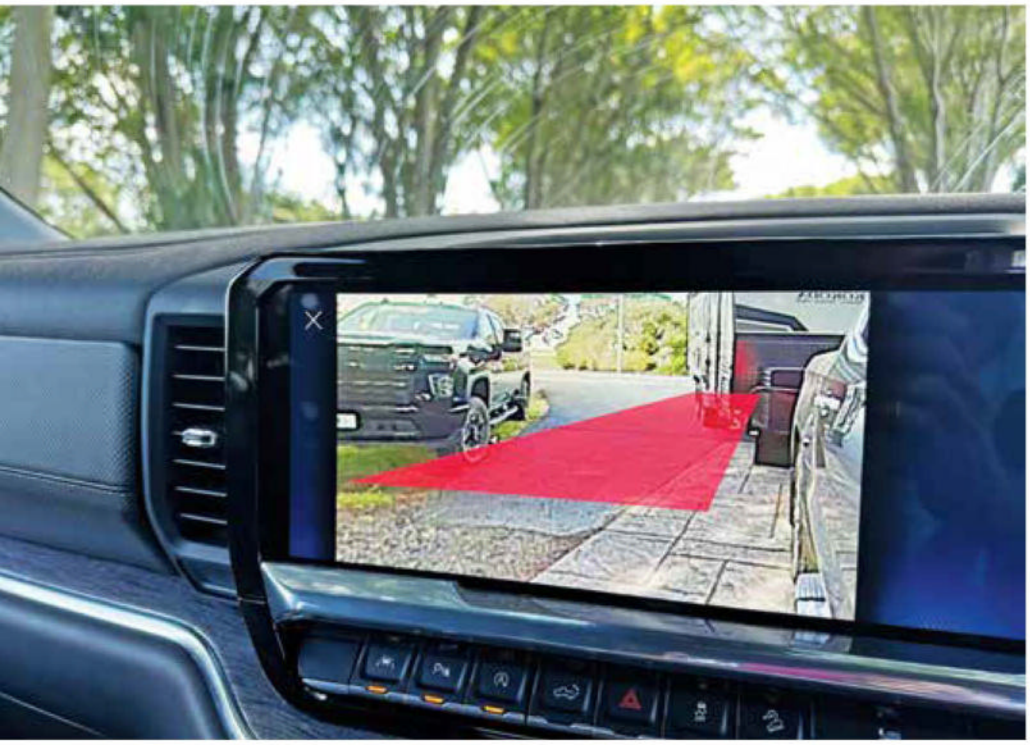
CONS

- V8 thirst
- Small tank

> "My favourite is how the main screen *shows vision down the side of the truck and trailer when indicating to turn*"



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Blind spot monitoring; Dashboard featuring a new, larger screen for the infotainment system; Driver's instrument cluster display

use of a new, larger screen for the Infotainment system and the main dash. For CarPlay, Android Auto and setting trailer configuration and so on, the new 13.4in main screen is easy to use and read. Where it comes into its own is in blind spot monitoring though. The new 12.3in main dash screen is equally as good with a multitude of configurations programmed plus the option to personalise yours.

I spent the most time in the LTZ with the drive from our accommodation to Norwell Motorplex – a good test of city traffic, undulating hills and highway cruising over ~35km. In tow I had a Kokoda Force 8 with a tare of 2880kg and ATM of 3500kg. That's well within the capability of the LTZ whose braked-tow rating tops out at 4500kg, but it was still no lightweight.

On paper, the specs of the 1500s are pretty good with kerb weights at 2543kg and 2583kg for the LTZ and ZR2 respectively. Both have a 3300kg GVM, so payloads are a bit less than you'd expect from such big vehicles. Their GCMs differ with the LTZ at 7160kg and ZR2 at 6851kg. Both can tow

3500kg with a 50mm ball and the LTZ ups the ZR2 with a 4500kg max tow capacity with a 70mm ball over the 4200kg limit of the ZR2. Doing some sums at max tow capacity and the pair are both hamstrung by their GCMs though, a common theme among many manufacturers.

With a 4500kg van behind the LTZ and after subtracting the kerb weight, you are left with only 117kg before you max out your GCM. Only good enough for me and a case of beer; forget the kids and fishing gear. With a 3500kg van in tow, you can utilise the full GVM of the 1500 LTZ Premium which is a lot more than you can say about a lot of vehicles rated to 3500kg max braked towing.

BIG HITS

The Ram 1500 and Silverado 1500 sold more than 500,000 units globally last year. In the same period, VFACTS claims total new car sales topped 1.08 million locally. In just these two models, pretty much all new cars sold last year could have been one of these two. For me, this popularity is one of their strong points, I'll get to that.

Drive Summary
32.6 km
22.2 L/100km
0:48 hr:min
Range: 207 km

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The ZR2 is a performance machine; The interior offers fantastic long-distance comfort; Big but manageable

SMALL 2500HD?

Way back in *Caravan World* issue 628 I rated the big brother of the 1500, the 2500HD, highly. I suggested it was the most capable tow vehicle I'd reviewed but I also mentioned that it's not actually bigger than its 1500 siblings, and it's not.

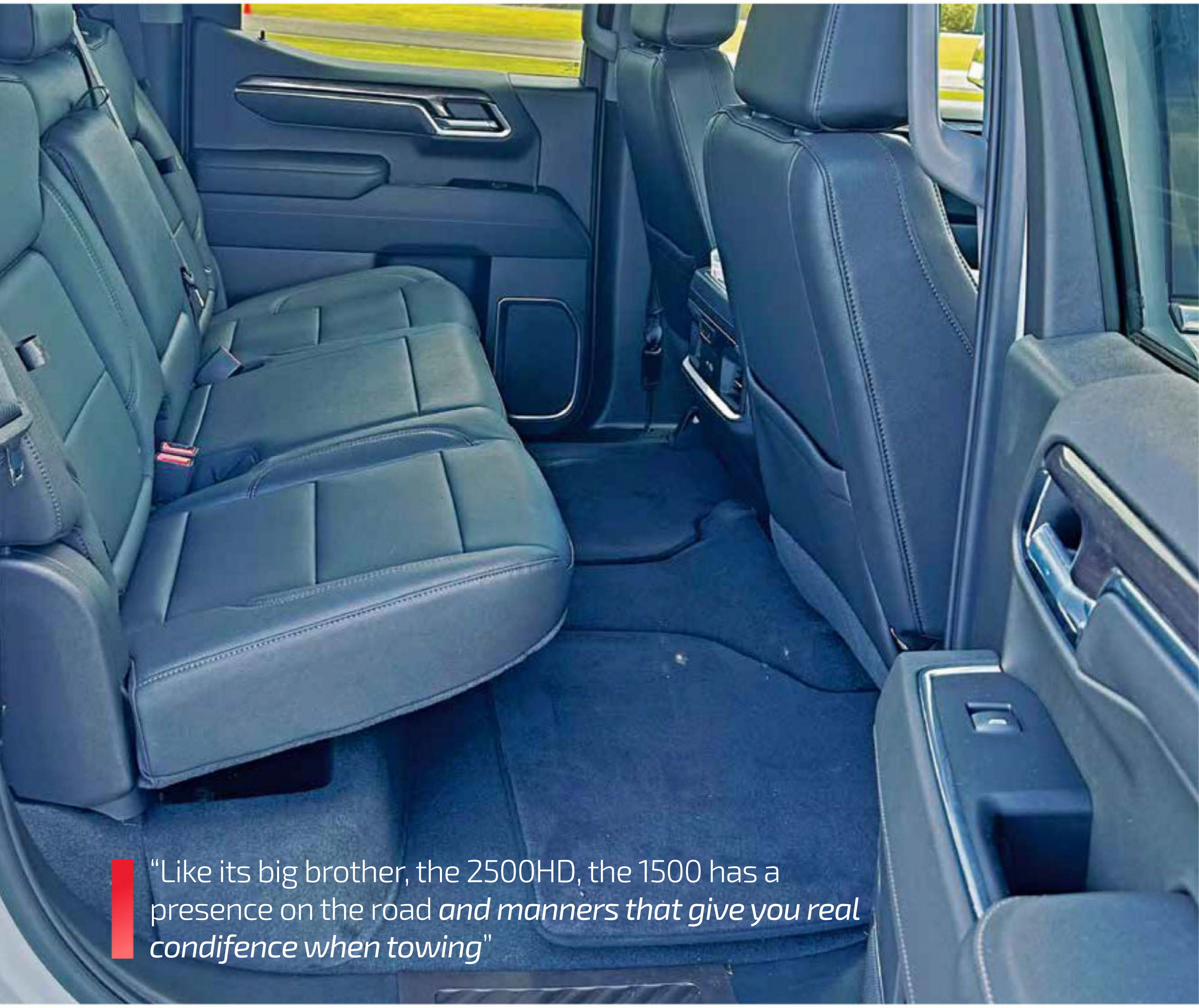
The 1500 shares its cab dimensions with the 2500HD. However, the bed is longer in the 2500 and its underpinnings are substantially more, um, heavy duty. I raise this as many people suggest the 1500 is a more manageable vehicle around town and in tight spots. I disagree, both are a magnitude bigger than what Australia grew up with. If you are thinking of either the 1500 or 2500, aim to book drive-through sites at parks and avoid ever parking one in the city. On the road, both are fantastic with their bulk sometimes motivating other drivers to give you a bit more room, but neither is unmanageable.

In the LTZ Premium, with the ZL1 Offroad Package, the factory-supplied suspension feels calibrated to smoother, less bumpy roads than ours as the nose of the truck will float up and down a lot and it feels like it nearly maxes out its travel on bigger dips. The ZR2, however, belies its girth with Multimatic DSSV dampers, a technology you'll find in high-performance sports cars and even championship winning F1 cars. In simple terms, the oils the dampers use are diverted in unique ways and the outcome is a big truck that soaks up small and big bumps with aplomb. Unhitched and with passenger Bathurst-winning driver Paul Morris on the backroads of Sirromet Winery, the ZR2 felt every bit dirt-road racer as it does monster truck. So even with the slightly reduced tow capacity and GCM, is the ZR2 the one to have? Well, yes but no.

IT'S ALL IN THE TYRES

Some TV ads will tell you there is only a palm-sized contact patch between you and the ground, and they are not wrong even if it's a big palm with the 1500s. What they are trying to say is that your tyres matter more than most people realise and nowhere was this more obvious than hard braking, with trailers in tow with vastly different tyres between the LTZ and ZR2.

The ZR2 comes shod with bespoke Goodyear Wrangler Mud Terrains, a tyre that has offroad performance in its design while the LTZ rolls on All Terrains. While the ZR2 ate up every bump off the pavement, it squirmed and struggled to haul up the test trailers on the dry test track; in braking the LTZ gave confidence and feedback in the right ways. In swerving and turning, the difference wasn't as obvious, but I would suggest if offroad driving is not more than 75 per cent of your driving, you'd be better off with the more road-focused All Terrains on the LTZ. If you want to tow a little and thrash around in the dirt more, go the ZR2, you won't be disappointed – just monitor your braking distances.



"Like its big brother, the 2500HD, the 1500 has a presence on the road *and manners that give you real condifence when towing*"

FUEL CONSUMPTION AND DRIVING

Yeah, so the LTZ and ZR2 are not going to compete with your Corolla on fuel use but good luck towing a large van with the family hatchback. I expect real consumption is going to be around 28L/100km across a mix of stop-start and over 90km/h suburban driving. In a promising sign for the 6.2L V8, I saw as low as 22L/100km on my 35km loop from Sirromet Winery to Norwell via a mixture of small hills, urban and freeway driving with the LTZ and a Kokoda Force 8.

It was too short of a run to honestly suggest it will pull that regularly. That would equal or beat a new LandCruiser with a similar-sized van, if true. We really need to arrange a longer tow of a few hundred kilometres to be sure, but the signs are promising.

In terms of feel, I noted how the nose of the LTZ feels light, or that it could do with some extra dampening from its standard shock absorbers but aside from the minor gripe, it is a flawless drive. Like its big brother, the 2500HD, the 1500 has a presence on the road and manners that give you real confidence towing. Its large footprint and sizeable weight mean it was not bullied by the trailers we towed and there are safety systems designed that are hard to beat.

SAFETY AND COMFORT

Like all US trucks and now the Next-Gen Ranger and Everest, there is a swathe of towing tech in the Silverados. You can set up the dimensions and weights of your favourite trailer as well as do singlehanded light checks, and, in Tow Haul Mode it will adjust a few driving parameters and gauge display. The gauge update is important as it adds the transmission temperature display while lessening shifts in the 10-speed to reduce heat build-up. It's clever stuff.

The MY23 also comes adorned with every acronym and safety feature imaginable from Rear-Cross Traffic Alert, StabiliTrak

Electronic Stability Control System with Traction Control and Forward Collision Alert to Low-Speed Automatic Emergency Braking. But probably my favourite is how the main screen shows vision down the side of the truck and trailer when indicating to turn. If you've set the length of your trailer in the onboard settings, it will also shade out the area where collisions are possible (see image). Again, clever and practical for towing and as you would expect, the 1500 LTZ comes with a factory-fitted trailer sway control and electronic brake controller, which is moved to near the driver's left knee, in easy reach. This was a detail I thought missed in the 2500HD which had it too far away, near the passenger's right knee.

It's comfortable to boot with touchpoints where you want, a driver's seat that is adjustable in almost any way and a driving position that allows for excellent visibility. I suspect, like the 2500HD, it will offer fantastic long-distance comfort. But there is one thing that'll stop you from those long drives and it's the obvious one, fuel.

BY THE NUMBERS

Fuel capacity is low, too low for a vehicle that towing a mammoth, 4500kg trailer could reasonably consume 30L/100km. At 91L, you'll want to keep a fuel station in mind, constantly, carry some jerry cans or upgrade the fuel tank. Thankfully, options exist in the Long Ranger (205L total), Walkinshaw (188L) and Brown Davis (185L). These tanks all replace the factory tank, consuming the void left in front of the factory tank, and all retail for around $3000 with easy-to-follow DIY instructions. I would ask my dealer to fit one

> "I suspect, like the 2500HD, the 1500 LTZ *will offer fantastic long-distance comfort*"

LEFT Both have a presence on the road and manners that give you real confidence towing

or have it done immediately after purchase.

There are 10 gears in the 10R80 gearbox. It felt crisp to shift and could keep the 6.2L Ecotec V8 on song if wanted. Though with 313kW (a touch under 420hp) and a diesel-like 624Nm of torque, you needn't open the throttle wide at all. It felt like it always had power in reserve.

Pricing is sharp with the LTZ Premium carrying a recommended retail price (RRP) of $128,000 and the ZR2 a $133,000 RRP. Factoring in on-road costs and it's likely you'll be spending around $140,000 driveaway for the LTZ. The ZR2 looks to be in hot demand so you may pay a bit more over RRP plus onroad costs to secure one in the short term. Compared to the darling of towing in Australia, the LC300, these prices are not bad and before you scream a Toyota is easier to service and find parts for, I would recommend having a look at the sales volumes of the 1500s. The volume of consumable and replacement parts for the Silverado (and Ram) is likely immeasurable and I'd suggest the lazy, L86 V8 shares a lot of DNA with one of the world's best, the

MY23 CHEVROLET SILVERADO
1500 LTZ PREMIUM AND ZR2

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Length 5930mm
Width 2086mm
Height 1930mm
Wheelbase 3475mm
Ground clearance (at kerb weight) 228mm
Kerb mass 2543kg
Gross Vehicle Mass 3300kg
Gross Combined Mass 7160kg
Towing capacity Unbraked/braked 4500/750kg

DRIVETRAIN
Engine 6.2L V8
Transmission 10-speed automatic with 2-speed 4WD transfer case
Power 313W at 5600rpm
Torque 624Nm from 4100rpm

GENERAL
Fuel capacity 91L
Suspension Front: Independent coils, sway bar; Rear: Solid axle, leaf sprung
Brakes Front and rear vented discs
Wheels 20in alloy with All-Terrain tyres
Warranty 3 Years/100,000km
RRP $128,000

MORE INFORMATION
gmspecialtyvehicles.com

RIGHT AND BELOW Compliance plates show the ATM of the boat used in our tow test; The Kokoda Force 8 had a tare of 2880kg and ATM of 3500kg – well within the capability of the LTZ

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
It is not far from high-spec 300 Series LandCruiser money but the 2500HD is not much more again

TOWING PERFORMANCE
Only its thirst, which was pretty good, holds it back a touch

HITCHING UP
Up to 15 views from the cameras, a solo light check system and excellent checklists impress

CREATURE COMFORTS
Touchpoints are better than its big brother and its seats and layout are just as good

ACCESSIBILITY OF SPARE PARTS
They'll sell over a million of these so parts won't be an issue, in the US

FUEL ECONOMY
It was better than I expected, I am not going to lie, but it's still thirsty versus Japanese utes

SOLO PERFORMANCE
All of the tech makes it a breeze to use but due to its size, it's best out of the city

ENGINE POWER
I rarely had to ask much of the thumping V8 but its power and torque are high in the revs

INNOVATION
The MY23 version is more of a light facelift than a new model but its new screens are welcome

X-FACTOR
The rarity of US trucks is waning but they still command position on busy roads and will out-tow anything

LS series of V8s. Short of the parts used to remanufacture the trucks to righthand drive, you should never have an issue getting a part and they should be durable.

THE WRAP

Do I think the Silverado has the edge on the Ram 1500? It is close, but yes. The e-Torque hybrid engine in the Ram hasn't shown to be more efficient than non-hybrid variants and the signs are promising for the Silverado in terms of fuel consumption under-tow. The 1500 Ram Limited benefits from self-levelling air suspension which is frankly fantastic but carries a hefty price premium (around $25,000). Compared to the more similarly spec'd Ram 1500 Laramie, it's very close with the Ram around $5000 more expensive than the LTZ Premium.

Both the Ram 1500 and LTZ are hamstrung by low GCMs, and the Ram Laramie has a low payload too; no separating them there. The same goes for their warranty which is three-year/100,000km and service intervals (12,000km). Where the two are separated is on the inside. In terms of interior, the Silverado now takes the mantle of best-in-class with larger displays, and I think better all-around feel (this is subjective, of course).

What I think will sway your choice is the availability of a dealer for servicing and the look of them. And looks are subjective, aye mum?

> *"Do I think the Silverado has the edge on the Ram 1500?* It is close, but yes"

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WARRANTY

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WATERPROOF

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DISCHARGE RATES
PERFECT FOR USE
WITH INVERTERS

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Lifespan	4000 Cycles	~300 Cycles
Charge Rate	1-100A	15A
Discharge Rate	270A (Peak Discharge 5 Seconds)	~40A
Fridge Run Time (Based on 1A Draw)	4+ Days	2 Days
Warranty	3 Years	12 Months

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WORDS *John Hughes* ***PICS*** *Supplied*

SEALANTS AND ADHESIVES...

IS MORE ALWAYS BETTER?

Keeping water and dust out of your van is essential for keeping it in good condition and John Hughes did some research into the best products to use on your pride and joy.

A while ago I came across a caravan that looked like someone had taken a brickie's trowel and applied silicone 30mm thick at every sealing point on the roof. I am not talking about a thin film 30mm wide – I mean it was 30mm thick sitting on top of the roof. It got me thinking, is more always better?

I kicked this question around with a couple of my colleagues at *Caravan World* and it triggered a bunch of other questions. Is the stuff used all over caravans actually silicone or is it something else? To what extent do these products act as adhesives versus sealants? What processes are important to optimise sealing and bonding? How do substrates work in conjunction with sealants and adhesives? Should sealants be replaced over time?

It's such an important topic because we suspect water ingress is the most common cause of the demise of a caravan. And we have to throw in dust ingress as potentially one of the most annoying things you can deal with in a caravan. With the help of some industry experts, we have a crack at answering these questions. It may help you in researching buying a new caravan or considering the requirements of maintaining an existing one. We do have to admit though, it is tricky to see whether a manufacturer has done a good job of sealing and bonding as the bulk of the work is 'covered up' when the van goes together.

> "We suspect water ingress is the most common cause ***of the demise of a caravan***"

ABOVE Vacationer Caravans pay attention to detail in sealing

H.B. Fuller
FulaFlex
650FC
FAST CURE
MS SEALANT & ADHESIVE
WHITE
420g

> "We want a seal to prevent water and dust *from leaking between the fitting/appliance and the hole*"

ABOVE Not all silicones are the same

BONDING AND SEALING

There are some parts of the van that are not generally intended to be disassembled and others that will need to be over time. The wall, floor and roof panels on a van are full of holes that have things inserted in them – windows, vents and plumbing to name a few. Obviously, we want a seal to prevent water and dust from leaking between the fitting/appliance and the hole. Things such as vents or air-conditioners are prone to failing over time and need replacing. Therefore, we need to be able to remove them. This is where it is important that the sealing method used must have a limited bond strength otherwise it is never going to come out. We also have other instances where structural adhesion is critical, such as how the floor is attached to the chassis or how the roof is attached to the walls. In these instances, the adhesives applied are so strong that I have seen repair jobs where you try to pull apart the materials, and the walls or the roof will break before the adhesive yields.

USING THE CORRECT PRODUCTS AND USING THEM CORRECTLY

We had a chat with Chris Bogos, Head Chemist, and Heather Felosvary, Technical Representative, from HB Fuller to learn more. HB Fuller is a leading adhesives and sealant supplier to the RV industry and construction/manufacturing.

JH: I talk to a lot of caravan manufacturers who tell me there are a surprisingly large number of tubes of sealant/adhesives that go into making a van. Just how many is it?

CB: Some manufacturers dispense adhesive from larger packs known as sausages but if we talk in cartridges, the same size you would buy at the hardware store, it is quite typical for 100-200 cartridges to be used in building one van.

JH: I have seen some vans with heaps of exposed sealant applied at sealing points. Does laying it on thick help?

CB: No, you are looking for a bond and or seal between the two joining surfaces and a thin skin on the joint area where it is exposed to the environment. If the sealant is whacked on thick in the exposed area, it's a clue that there is some form of shortcoming in the sealing process, and they are overcompensating with sealant.

JH: What are the top few products you supply in the RV industry?

HF: We have two core products. One is a 100 per cent silicone known as FulaSeal Pro 300 and another which is a hybrid silicone/urethane product known as FulaFlex 650FC. The 100 per cent silicone product is designed as a sealant and does not have the same bonding adhesion properties as the hybrid product. Limited bonding is good because it means that the seal can be mechanically broken if necessary to replace a hatch or alike. The 100 per cent silicone product has another advantage of attracting less dust.

Conversely, it's easy to understand the pros and cons of the hybrid product. It has superior bond strength while maintaining excellent sealing properties making it the

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ABOVE Regal Caravans use HB Fuller hybrid silicones to attach panels

product of choice for applications such as adhering panels to frames. Its downside is when it's exposed it tends to attract dust. It's not a functional problem but is just hard to clean. So, our really simple rule of thumb is if you can see it use 100 per cent silicone, and if it's hidden use the hybrid product.

JH: So, it's important not to get the products mixed up on the assembly line?

CB: Correct. It boils down to 100 per cent silicone used in the wrong place may not stick enough and hybrid products in the wrong place may stick too well.

JH: What are other important disciplines?

HF: Surface preparation is probably the most important step in ensuring a good outcome. It is critical that the substrates are thoroughly cleaned before applying sealants/adhesives. Using a cleaner such as isopropyl alcohol is best practice for removing any contaminants such as oil. Working some distance away from high dust environments such as CNC machines is also important.

CB: Another example of more is not always better – product applied too thick will have a hard time curing and not reach its full bond strength.

CB: It is important for the caravan manufacturer to be aware of the product 'open time'. It's the maximum time between applying the adhesive to one surface and ensuring it comes into contact with the other surface. If you wait too long the adhesive will form a skin and a proper bond will not take place.

JH: What advice would you give DIYers doing maintenance and repairs?

CB: It's definitely critical to keep an eye on seals regularly. If you see deterioration such as peeling, cracking or shrinking do something about it. However, if it aint broke don't fix it. Disturbing a good seal and trying to create a new one can potentially create an ingress point.

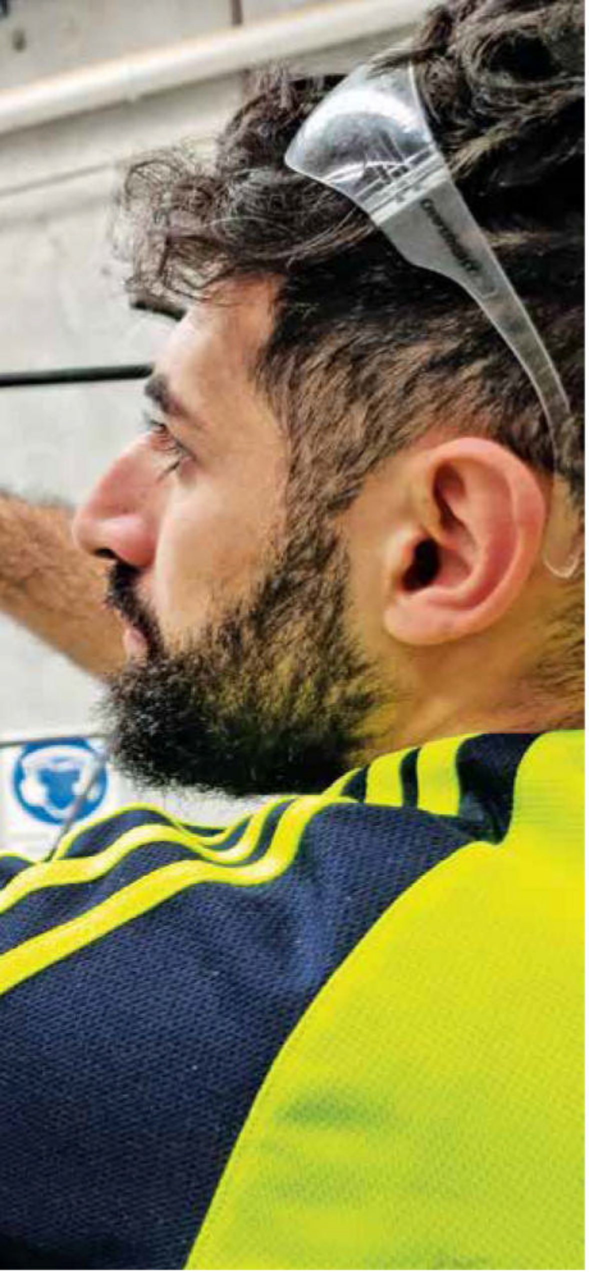
HF: If it is necessary to redo a seal, one of the most important things to know is there is no point trying to apply silicone on top of silicone because it simply won't adhere. Therefore, existing silicone must be thoroughly removed prior to resealing. Scraping with a plastic tool is generally the best approach, being careful not to damage exposed surfaces.

PANELS

We also thought it would be interesting to have a chat with Gretel Hornsey, Technical Sales from PROBOND, one of the major suppliers of aluminium sheeting to the RV industry. After all, it is their products to which adhesives and sealants are applied.

JH: What's your take on sealant and adhesives as a substrate supplier?

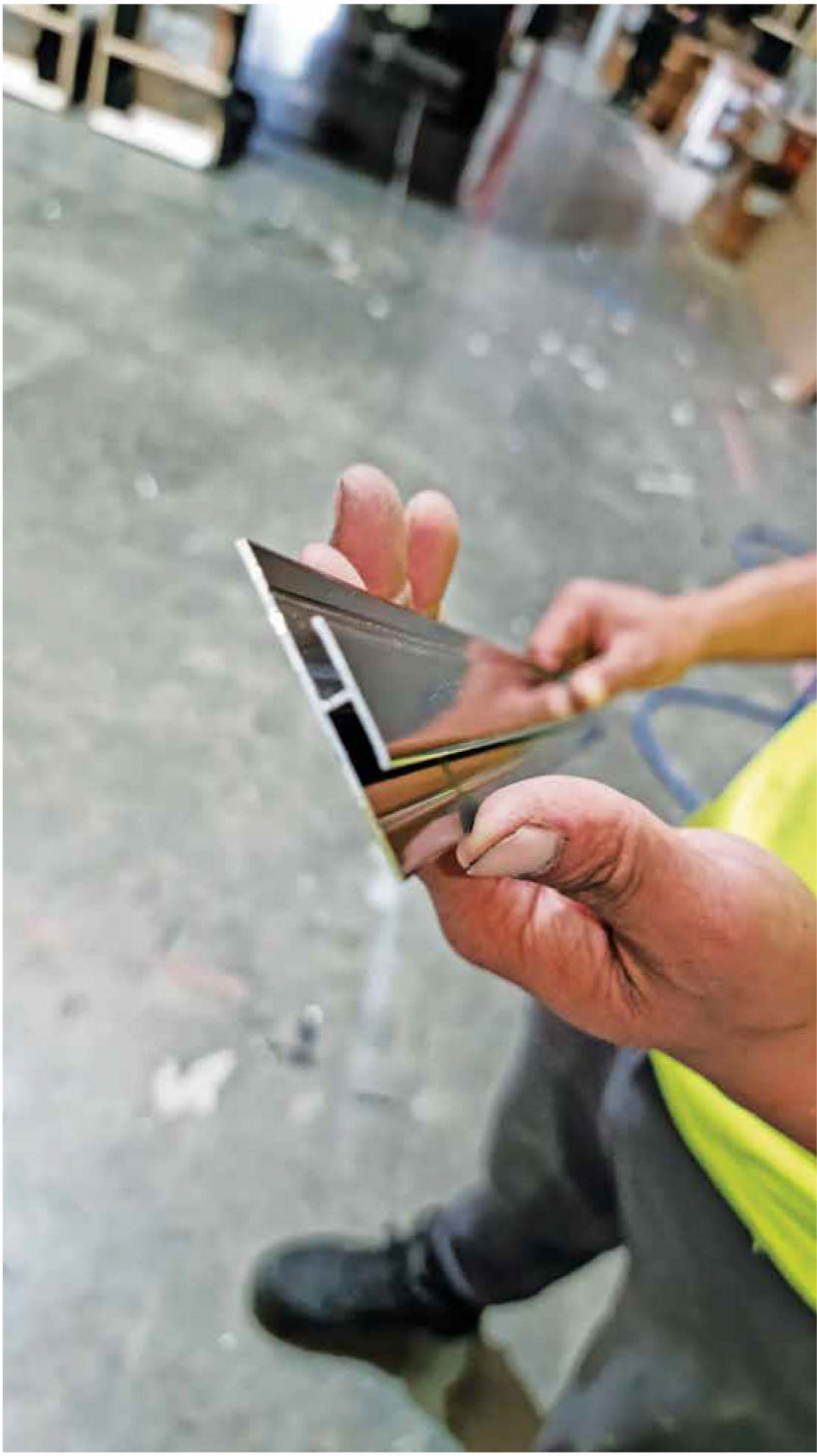
GH: PROBOND aluminium composite panels need to be bonded to frames using an MS Polymer (modified silicone also known as hybrid silicone), with an elasticity of 50 per cent or greater. The key reason for this is that the adhesive needs to have bonding strength with sufficient flexibility to move with the panel when it expands and contracts. A normal silicone comes into play when creating a seal on the H moulds. We strongly recommend sealing along the exterior of the join (H mould), to prevent water ingress as this can lead to corrosion. For those who may not know H moulds are aluminium profiles shaped like an H that our sheets slip into to create a joint. The sheets need to be cut to a length to enable a 3mm gap inside the joint so that they can expand and contract.



If the sheets expand and have nowhere to go, they can either buckle or the adhesive bond can shear causing it to come away from the frame.

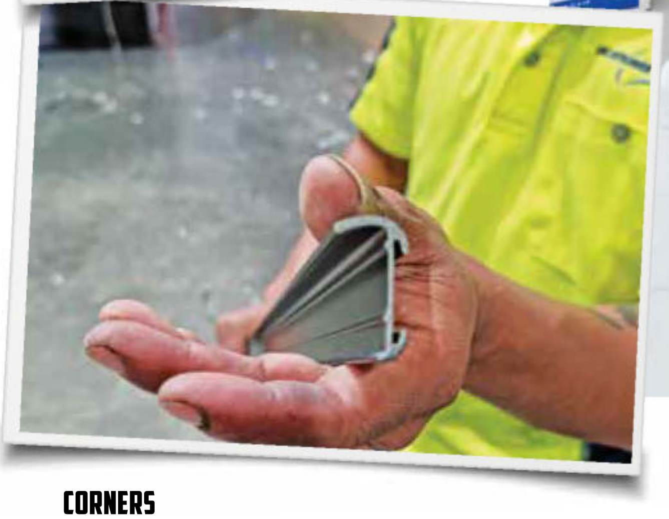
To simplify the process for caravan manufacturers, PROBOND is about to launch an H mould that has small internal rubber inserts at intervals to allow for expansion. They will also be colour matched to our panels for a clean look.

> *"If you see deterioration such as peeling, cracking or shrinking do something about it.* However, if it aint broke don't break it"



ABOVE H mould is used for joining panels

> "When van builders use the right products in the right way at the right time, *the results are fantastic*"



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE HB Fuller silicone product is used for sealing hatches; J mould is used for joining corners; Sealing is applied on the exterior of H mould

CORNERS

As the name suggests, corner moulds create the join/seal where surfaces meet at 90 degrees such as where the walls and roof connect. The traditional method for achieving this is with an aluminium profile shaped like a J and known as a J mould. The J mould is held in place and sealed with a hybrid silicone plus secured with screws. The screw holes are a potential water ingress point over time. Some more contemporary van manufacturers place complete faith in the adhesive and use large corner caps also usually made of aluminium without any fasteners.

THE WRAP

Suppliers to the RV manufacturing industry make available great products to bond and seal components. When van builders use the right products in the right way at the right time, the results are fantastic. The challenge as a consumer (and journalists for that matter) is it is often not easy to see if this has been done well once the van has been built. What you can do however is ask lots of questions of the manufacturer and if you get a chance take a factory tour and observe with a critical eye.

IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL.

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BUSHMASTER OFFROAD CARAVANS:

ROUGH, TOUGH AND READY TO GO

Since 1994, Terry Ryan has been building some of Australia's toughest caravans, designed for offroad touring and backed by a lifetime warranty on their aluminium frame, chassis and suspension.

***Words** Julija Zivanovic **Pics** Supplied*

ABOVE Custom-built Bushmaster Offroad Caravans come in four models

Founded in 1994, Bushmaster Offroad Caravans has been making tough, offroad caravans for almost 30 years. Proudly Australian owned and made, founder and owner Terry Ryan strives to produce sturdy, practical offroad caravans that owners can enjoy for life. Terry's philosophy when it comes to building caravans can be summed up in three key principles. Firstly, he takes the time to construct a limited number of caravans to the highest standard. Secondly, he uses the very best components he can access, using Australian made wherever he can. And thirdly, he includes every feature possible to create a unique caravanning experience.

A BIT OF BACKGROUND

The story starts with founder Terry Ryan, a New South Wales country boy who studied engineering, then cabinet making and wood carving. In 1980, Terry built his own suspension under a trailer to take camping and to carry his musical instruments to gigs around the country. To this day, the trailer is still used on a weekly basis and was the foundation of Bushmaster's Rolling Thunder Suspension, which is used on its Wild Wheels caravan model. Terry was working in Brisbane selling caravans when his urge to work for himself took over. He started building his own offroad camper trailers, under the business name Koala, and before long he moved production to Bundaberg, further north along the coast. The business continued to grow and, in 1994, Bushmaster Offroad Caravans was born. In 2005, Terry moved the business to a Campbellfield factory in Melbourne, where he still works in the workshop personally building the high-quality caravans.

THE RANGE

The Bushmaster range includes four models – Ultimate Outback, Ironbark, Bluegum and Wild Wheels – some of which can be made in multiple sizes. Terry offers custom building, with the customer deciding the length of the van, the colour and all inclusions.

All Bushmaster caravan models proudly feature 96 standard inclusions. Some of these include a firewood carrying box on the rear bumper bar, full-width tunnel boot, external speakers, picnic table, rollout awning, space heater, double-glazed windows with fly screen and block-out screen, reverse cycle air-conditioner, front-loading washing machine, reversing camera and light and much, much more. They also offer a range of optional extras, like recliner chairs for the dinette, satellite TV, outside shower, bike carrying rack and much more.

ABOVE AND BELOW Recliner chairs are an option; Customers can choose colours and all inclusions

PASSION YOU CAN SEE

Terry says that his greatest joy, apart from making a living with his own ideas and hands, is answering his phone to a happy voice from a customer telling him about where they've travelled and how much they love their Bushmaster caravan. Terry's passion about the caravans he builds can be seen all throughout the business, such as his dedication to road test every caravan himself before it is picked up. Terry goes one step further for his customers, setting up the caravan towing height to match the customer's tow vehicle.

Bushmaster provides a five-year warranty on everything in the caravan. Plus, the aluminium frame and chassis and Simplicity load sharing offroad suspension, which are standard inclusions on all models, each have a lifetime warranty. Terry has put a lifetime of experience and passion into his vans and if there's something that can add to the offroad touring experience, you can bet Terry's thought of it.

BUSHMASTER OFFROAD CARAVANS

28 Production Drive
Campbellfield, Vic 3061
P: 0408 194 481
E: bushmasteroffroadcaravans@gmail.com
W: bushmasteroffroadcaravans.com.au

FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND'S MOST UNCONVENTIONAL CAMPGROUNDS

Eight unique and interesting caravan-friendly camps within easy reach of Cairns that will break you out of that traditional caravan park rut.

Words **SANDY VAN MOURIK** *Pics* **SANDY AND MARC VAN MOURIK**

Looking for something a bit different to the typical, run-of-the-mill caravan park? Far North Queensland offers a number of unique caravan-friendly campgrounds for visitors looking to experience the variable natural beauty this region has to offer. From World Heritage-listed beachfront locations to lava tubes in the outback, these campgrounds have a range of amenities and activities to suit every type of traveller, all with an interesting twist. Whether you're looking to relax and unwind, have a family-friendly getaway or explore the local wilderness, this area has something to offer for everyone.

> ***"Go straight to bed once the final credits roll"***

MAREEBA DRIVE-IN THEATRE

www.mareebadrivein.com.au

For a good dose of nostalgia, you can't go past the Mareeba Drive-In Theatre situated on the Atherton Tablelands. Founded in 1962 and recently taken over by new management who are bringing it back up to its previous glory, this charming outdoor theatre plays new and old movies almost every weekend throughout the year. While not a formal campground, they allow patrons to stay overnight in the facility once the movies for the night have finished, free of charge.

You're not allowed to cook outdoors on the premises; however, the onsite cafe offers tasty food at a reasonable price. The cafe is what keeps the drive-in viable, so management encourages visitors to purchase their meals there. Overall, it's a fun and affordable night out, made all the more convenient by being able to go straight to bed once the final credits roll.

STATS:

- **Address:** 5303 Kennedy Hwy, Mareeba
- 60 minutes from Cairns
- Unpowered only
- Pet-friendly
- **Amenities:** toilets and cafe

OZtrail
OZtrail

ABOVE AND BELOW This unique outdoor theatre is returning to its previous glory; Mareeba Drive-In allows campers to stay for the night – free of charge – once the movie has finished

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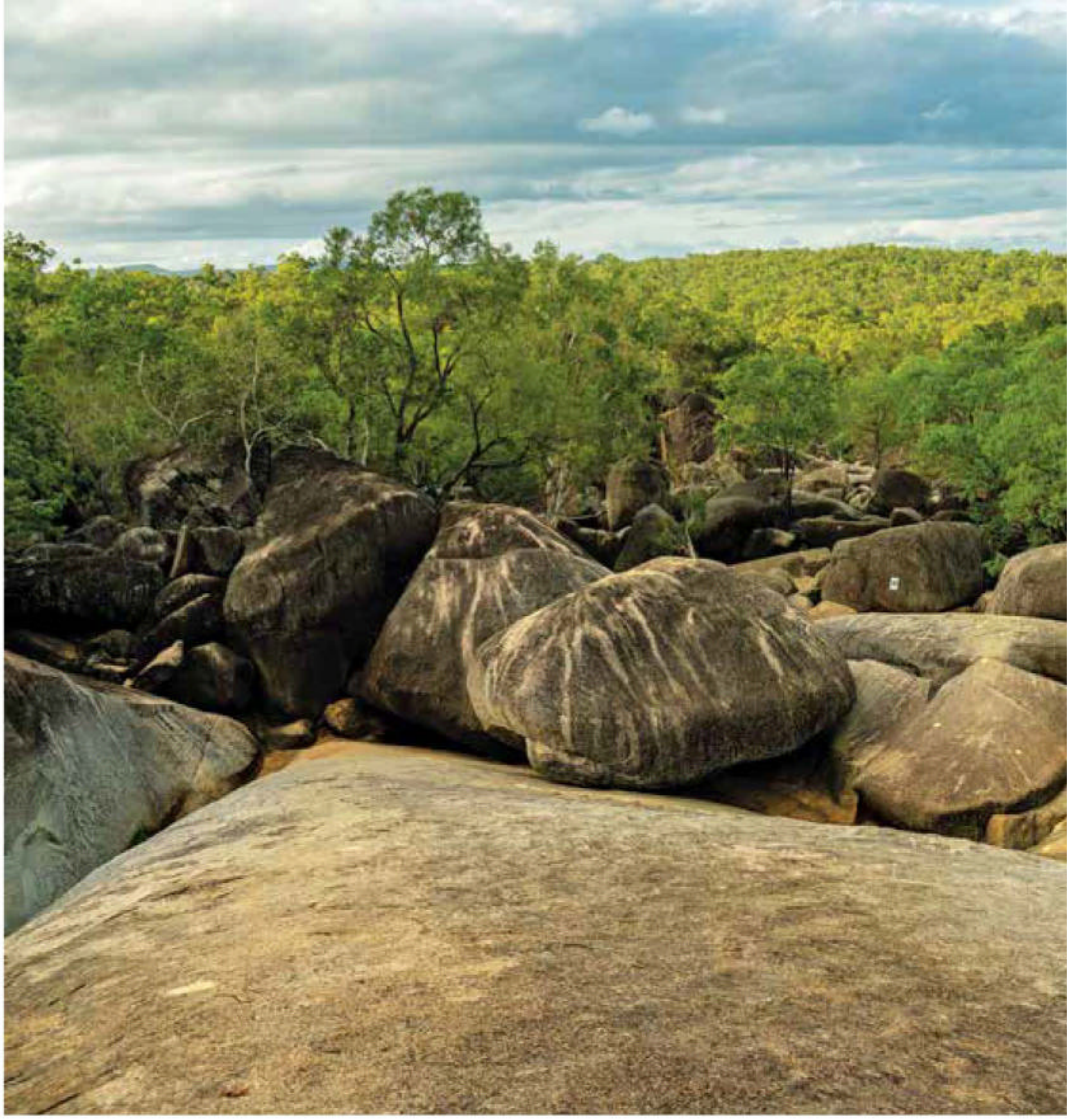
CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW The top attraction is the Mareeba Rock Wallabies; Beautiful scenery at Granite Gorge; The campground has all the amenities of a caravan park



GRANITE GORGE NATURE PARK

www.granitegorge.com.au

Granite Gorge Nature Park is a local favourite in the Atherton Tablelands, just out of town from Mareeba. The campground is set on the edge of a beautiful granite rock gorge, which offers scenic walks of varying difficulty, as well as numerous swimming spots (the weir near the campground is the most idyllic). However, the main attraction is the local colony of adorable Mareeba rock-wallabies, which you can hand feed with food provided by the park. Other animals you can interact with are turtles, a collection of domesticated birds and more. While the park offers day visits, the campground's lovely bush setting is so inviting, and staying overnight means you can be there at dawn and dusk, which is when you're most likely to have an encounter with the wallabies. Plus, you'll only be a short drive from the many attractions that the Atherton Tablelands has to offer.

STATS:
- **Address:** 332 Paglietta Rd, Arriga
- 80 minutes from Cairns, 15 minutes from Mareeba
- Powered and unpowered sites
- Pet-friendly
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, laundry, camp kitchen, swimming holes

> ***"The campground is set on the edge of a beautiful granite rock gorge, which offers scenic walks of varying difficulty, as well as numerous swimming spots"***

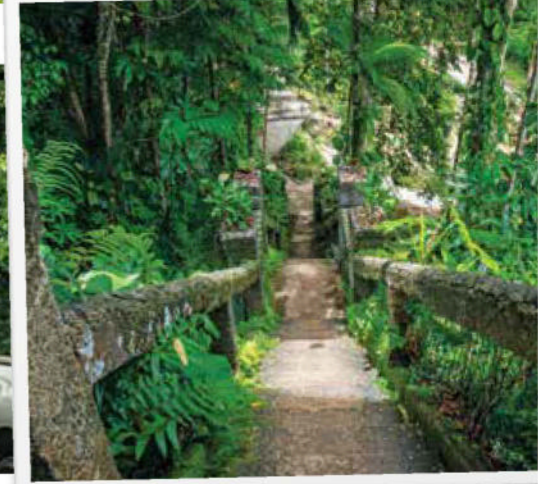
PARONELLA PARK

www.paronellapark.com.au

Paronella Park is a place like no other founded by a man like no other. José Paronella, an eccentric and driven man originally from Catalonia, came to Innisfail in 1913 with a dream to build a castle for his fiancée, who was still in Catalonia. Although things didn't necessarily go to plan, he married and brought his new bride back with him to Australia, where they set about building Paronella Park. The park quickly became a popular recreation ground for the local public; in its heyday, it had a theatre, dance hall, tea garden, swimming facilities and more. The Paronellas even built North Queensland's first hydroelectric system to power it all. While the original buildings have lost some of their old glory as the rainforest attempts to slowly reclaim them, the new owners have worked hard to restore and preserve what's left of the park, and today it is one of North Queensland's most popular tourist attractions. The entry fee includes a day tour, where you learn more about the fascinating history of the park; a night tour, which includes a dazzling light show and one night's powered camping among the lush rainforest; and unlimited entry for two years.

STATS:
- **Address:** 1671 Innisfail Japoon Rd, Mena Creek
- 1.5 hours from Cairns
- Powered and unpowered sites
- Pet-friendly (there is a kennel available when touring the park itself)
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, barbecues, cafe, gift shop, pub restaurant next door

KORONA
FORCE



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The park's waterfall; One night of powered camping is included in the entry fee; The castle José built for his bride; The park is a top tourist attraction

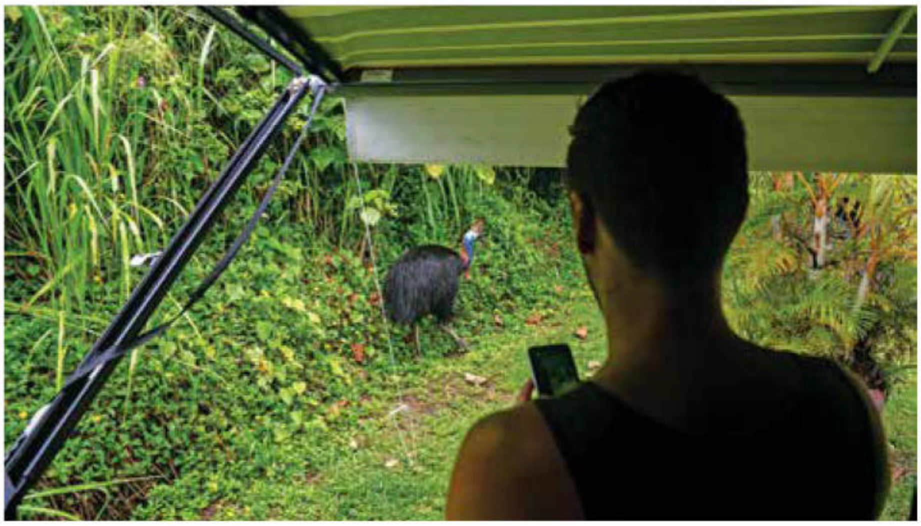
> *"You look up and see a large, prehistoric-looking bird coming your way"*

ETTY BAY CARAVAN PARK

www.ettybaycaravanpark.com.au

At first glance, Etty Bay Caravan Park seems like your standard beachside caravan park, which it is, apart from one small – or not so small – detail. When you arrive, you check in at the office and get directions to your assigned spot. Just as you're putting out the awning and getting ready for that first post-setup beverage, a bit of movement in the surrounding forest catches your eye. You look up and see a large, prehistoric-looking bird coming your way. No, you haven't accidentally booked into Jurassic Park! Etty Bay is most known for its local population of cassowaries; in fact, this stretch of coastline is known as the 'Cassowary Coast'. These colourful flightless, often elusive, birds are native to the tropical forests of Australia and Papua New Guinea, and while their numbers are unfortunately declining due to habitat loss, a sighting during a stay at Etty Bay is almost guaranteed. Besides close encounters with this unique animal, the caravan park offers beautiful beachside camping and makes a great base for exploring other highlights of the region such as Josephine Falls and Babinda Boulders.

STATS:
- **Address:** The Esplanade, Etty Bay
- 1.5 hours from Cairns
- Powered and unpowered sites
- No pets allowed
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, laundry, cafe, kiosk
- **Note:** there are no facilities for dumping of either black or grey water on the premises



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Lush vegetation at Etty Bay; The caravan park is right on the beach; A cassowary sighting is almost guaranteed

KOKODA
FORCE

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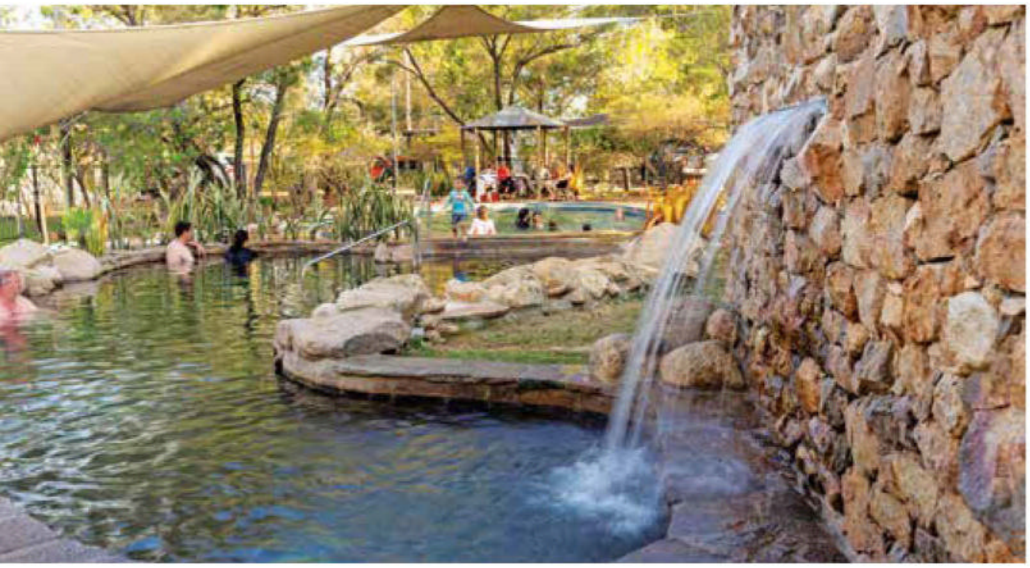
Natural THERMAL SPRINGS
POOL SPAS BATHS

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Innot Springs Leisure Park; The historic hot springs; The original hot springs beside the caravan park; Camping in a natural setting; The lovely pools at Innot Springs



> *"Innot Hot Springs Leisure Park has created an assortment of pools of varying temperatures, all fed by the natural springs"*

INNOT HOT SPRINGS LEISURE PARK

Europeans first discovered Innot Hot Springs in the 1870s when they learned from the local Mamu people of the apparent healing properties of the springs due to their high mineral content. It became a popular cure-all among settlers and was purported to heal anything from arthritis to skin conditions to respiratory issues. At one point, the water was even bottled and sent back to Europe as a health tonic. Today, the Innot Hot Springs Leisure Park has created an assortment of pools of varying temperatures, all fed by the natural springs running alongside the park. Guests can choose their preferred temperature in which to soak; the pools range from a cold pool at 20-25 degrees celsius to a hot pool at 43-45 degrees celsius. There's even an adults-only section for a more relaxing ambiance. You can still visit the original springs next to the caravan park for a more natural and rustic experience but be aware the pools here can literally be nearly boiling. Day visit passes are available, but why not spend the night so you can sneak off for an early morning dip and likely have a pool to enjoy all to yourself? That sounds like pure bliss to us!

STATS:

- **Address:** Kennedy Hwy, Innot
- Approx. 2.5 hours from Cairns
- Powered and unpowered sites
- Pet-friendly
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, laundry, camp kitchen, pool, breakfast bar, pub restaurant next door

BEACH TRACK

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Lush green sites at Cape Trib Camping; Just metres to the beach; The campground has everything you need for an enjoyable stay

CAPE TRIB CAMPING

www.capetribcamping.com.au

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Cape Tribulation, located approximately 2.5 hours north of Cairns, is that it borders upon not one but two UNESCO World Heritage sites; thus, it is often referred to as "where the rainforest meets the reef". The Daintree Rainforest, traditionally the land of the Kuku Yalanji people, is estimated to be more than 180 million years old and is home to a myriad of unique flora and fauna. Meanwhile, the Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef system at over 2300km long and houses a staggering number of marine species. While there are numerous picturesque camps throughout Cape Tribulation, Cape Trib Camping boasts the only beachfront caravan park in the area. It provides large, grassy sites nestled in the lush rainforest, with a pristine palm-lined white sand beach only steps away. This park definitely fits the definition of 'getting away from it all' – the only access point for caravans is via the Daintree Ferry, there is little to no reception at the campground and there are no nearby towns to quickly duck over to for supplies if needed. Nevertheless, you will find it difficult to run out of things to do here, from eco croc-spotting tours to trips out on the reef to tackling the scenic 4WD-only Bloomfield Track, there are so many options to meaningfully experience both of these precious ecosystems.

STATS:

- **Address:** 3812 Cape Tribulation Rd, Cape Tribulation
- 2.5 hours from Cairns
- Unpowered and powered sites
- No pets allowed
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, laundry, camp kitchen, wood-fired pizzas and bar
- **Note:** the park will shut if the ferry is closed for repairs and for a short period around February/March for monsoon season

THE LIONS DEN HOTEL

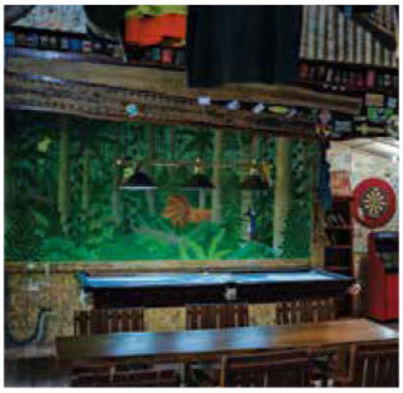
www.lionsdenhotel.net.au

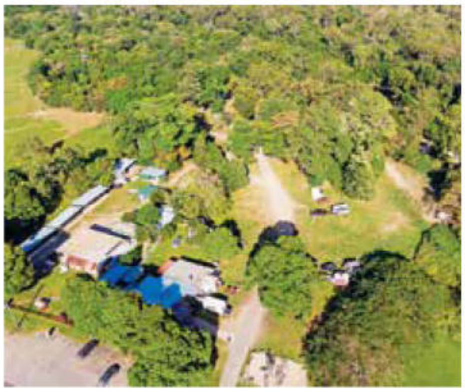
Australia has its fair share of iconic pubs across the country, and The Lions Den Hotel certainly deserves a place on that list. It is often a starting or finishing point for those travelling through Cape York and Pajinka (the Tip), Australia's northernmost point. As a result, there is a real adventurous spirit exuding from many of the patrons here. The energy in the pub most evenings is palpable, from those with bright eyes just starting their journey, to the weary, corrugations-rattled travellers with thrilling tales to tell. And if you have a bit too much fun during your time at the pub, your caravan can be a short walk – or stumble! – away in the provided campground. There's even a croc-free swimming hole for a refreshing recovery dip on a hot day, which up there is most days. The pub also has a small museum, which details the interesting history of the pub and the region, that's well worth a look.

STATS:

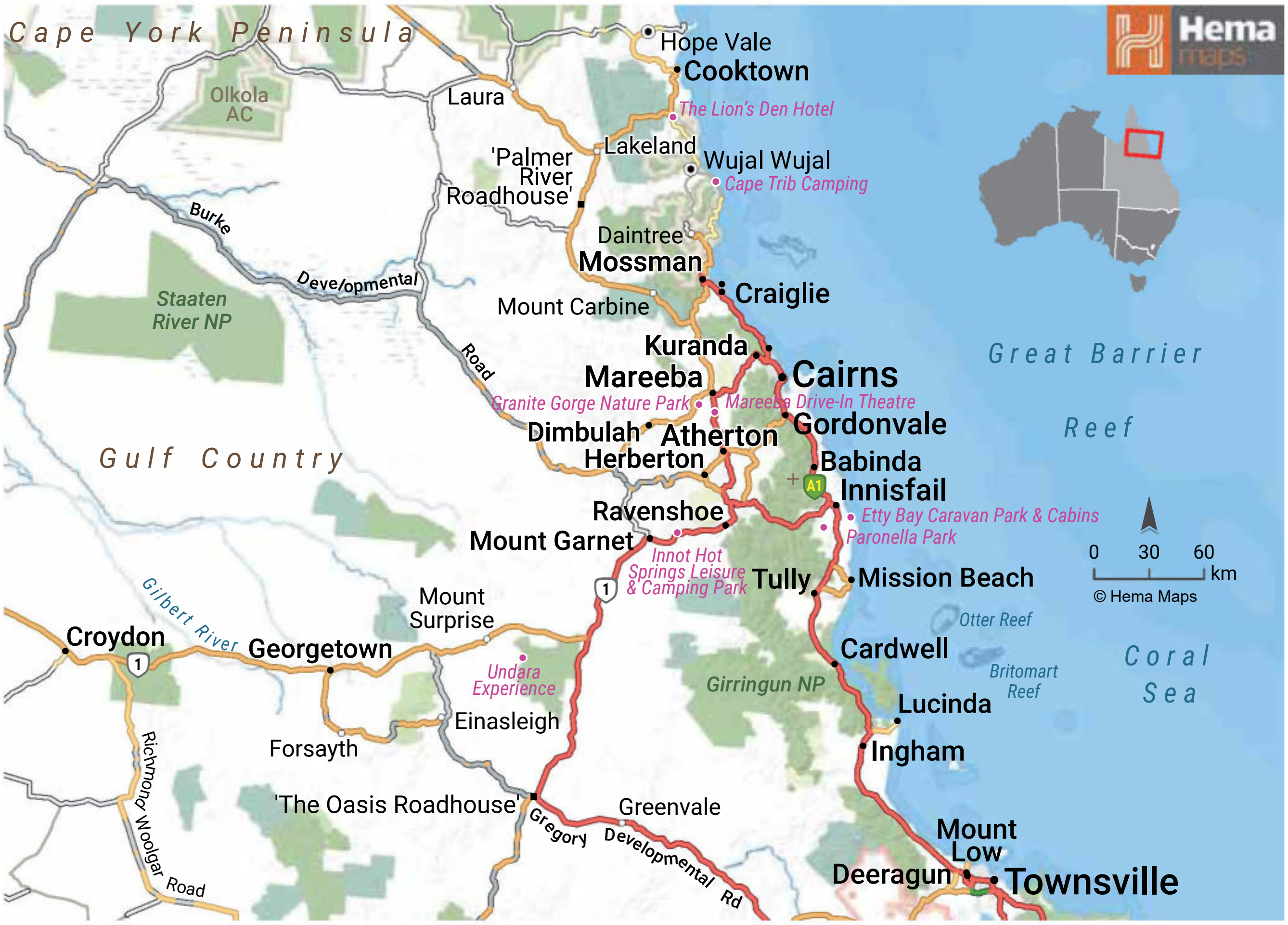
- **Address:** 398 Shiptons Flat Rd, Rossville
- 3.5 hours from Cairns, 20 minutes from Cooktown
- Powered and unpowered sites
- Pet-friendly (campground only, not the pub)
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, pub restaurant, swimming hole

THE LIONS DEN HOTEL





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The famous Lions Den Hotel; The pub entrance ; The pub offers camping out the back for weary travellers


Cape York Peninsula
Olkola AC
Laura
Hope Vale
Cooktown
The Lion's Den Hotel
'Palmer River Roadhouse'
Lakeland
Wujal Wujal
Cape Trib Camping
Burke
Developmental
Road
Staaten River NP
Daintree
Mossman
Craiglie
Mount Carbine
Kuranda
Cairns
Mareeba
Granite Gorge Nature Park
Mareeba Drive-In Theatre
Dimbulah
Atherton
Gordonvale
Herberton
Babinda
A1
Innisfail
Gulf Country
Ravenshoe
Etty Bay Caravan Park & Cabins
Paronella Park
Mount Garnet
Innot Hot Springs Leisure & Camping Park
Tully
Mission Beach
1
Mount Surprise
Gilbert River
Croydon
Georgetown
Undara Experience
Einasleigh
Forsayth
Otter Reef
Cardwell
Britomart Reef
Girringun NP
Lucinda
Ingham
Richmond Woolgar Road
'The Oasis Roadhouse'
Greenvale
Gregory Developmental Rd
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Townsville
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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Undara caravan park has all the mod cons; Native wildlife abounds; Exploring the lava tubes is a highlight; The longest lava tube in the world

UNDARA EXPERIENCE

www.undara.com.au

According to the language of the Traditional Owners of the land around Undara (the Ewamian people), Undara translates to 'long way', and you will certainly feel like you've come a long way from the familiar lush landscape of Far North Queensland when you arrive. A typical outback Queensland terrain – think flat, dry, red – greets you, and while it may not seem like there's much to see here, the real attraction lies underground. Undara boasts the longest lava tube from a single volcano in the world, which you can explore via three different tours on offer: the Archway Explorer, the Wind Tunnel Explorer and Wildlife at Sunset. The Archway Explorer is the most popular tour and takes you through a section of the lava tubes to admire the unique geology of three different arches, while the Wind Tunnel Explorer is a bit more rugged and may involve some scrambling over rocks as you traverse through the lava tubes. Lastly, the Wildlife at Sunset tour offers drinks and nibbles and close encounters with wildlife as you watch the thousands of microbats that have made the lava tubes their home leave for the evening. Book your tour(s) well ahead of time as they are very popular and will book out quickly, especially during peak periods such as school holidays. In addition, there are several bushwalking tracks that start at the facility, where you can get great views of the surrounding countryside and are likely to spot native animals such as wallabies, emus, monitor lizards and more.

STATS:
- **Address:** Undara Road, Mount Surprise
- 3.5 hours from Cairns
- Unpowered and powered sites
- No pets allowed
- **Amenities:** toilets and showers, laundry, camp kitchen, dump point, pool, restaurant and bar, convenience store
- **Note:** Camping shuts down during 'Green Season' for maintenance (usually November to March) but tours may still run during this time

---

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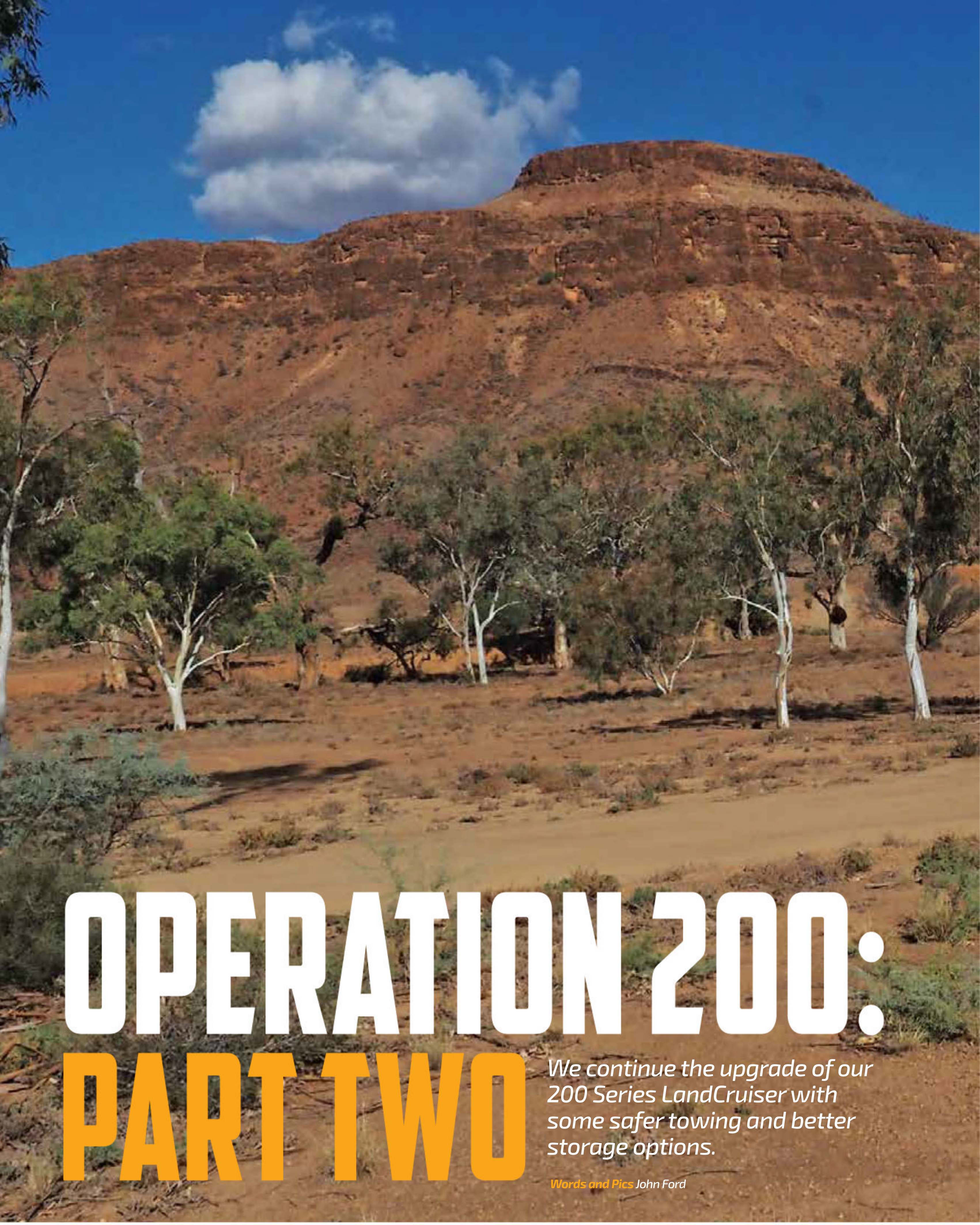


OPERATION 200:
PART TWO

We continue the upgrade of our 200 Series LandCruiser with some safer towing and better storage options.

Words and Pics John Ford

TRAKMASTER

> "Our first improvement to our Operation 200 *is a set of MSA towing mirrors*"

LOOKING BACK

In last month's issue we covered why a gross vehicle mass GVM upgrade is necessary if you want to add extras to your vehicle and still tow a van legally and safely. Our new Tough Dog suspension has added 500kg to our payload and means our 200 Series LandCruiser has much superior carrying capacity. The extra payload alloys us to fit items to make touring more enjoyable and probably safer.

While not an accessory that adds weight, our first improvement to our Operation 200 is a set of MSA towing mirrors. The law requires you to see along the side of the van and the standard 200 mirrors don't extend out far enough to do that. Coming in a range to suit most 4x4 vehicles, the MSA mirrors are Australian Design Rules (ADR) compliant and extend for a legal and clear view of following and overtaking traffic.

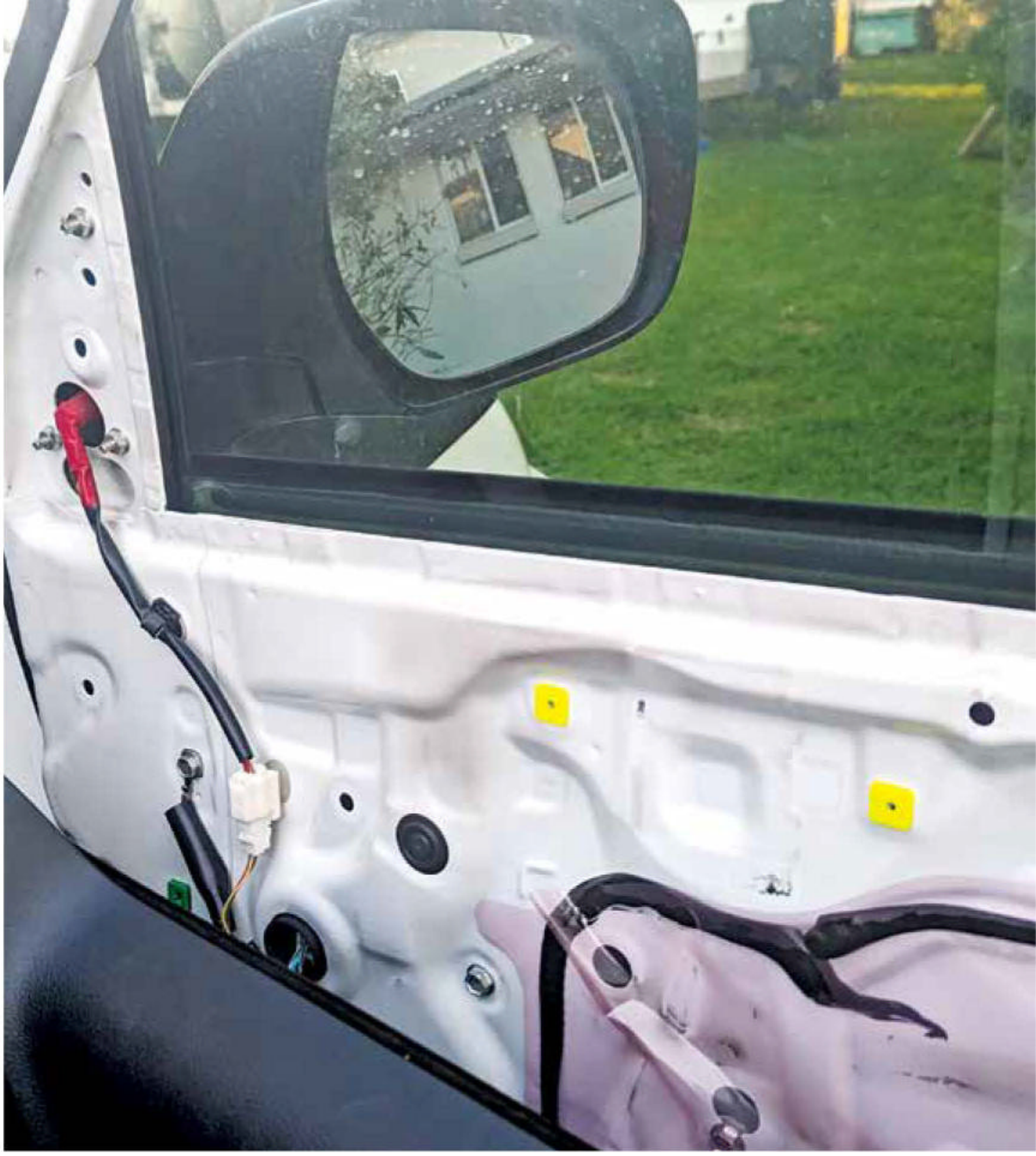
The mirrors look great, and they won a design award at the Specialty Equipment SEMA show in the USA. We chose the black version, but there's also chrome, and they feature a large single mirror pivoting on a heavy-duty extension slide. It's easy to move them out when towing and they pivot back if you needed. They can be set in either a vertical or horizontal position, and the mirror's actuator automatically adapts to give up and down and side to side movement.

The mirrors have a quality feel and the injection moulded plastic and die cast body seems heavy duty and robustly built.

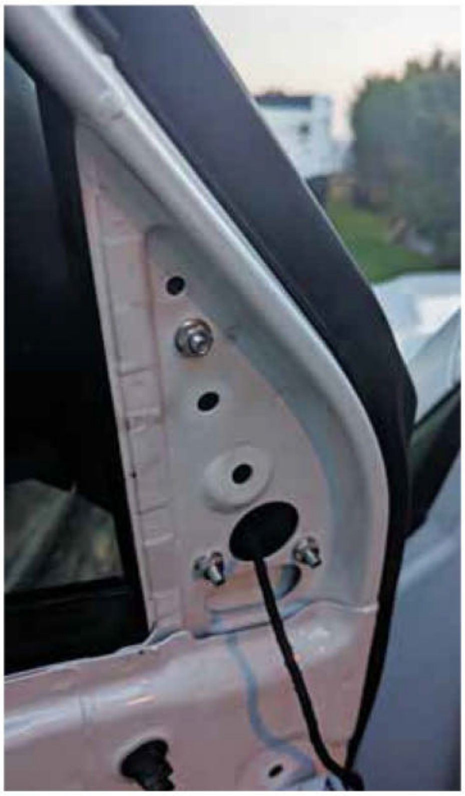
Fitting the mirrors is pretty straightforward, but I recommend a set of panel removal tools to keep your trim in good shape. Pop off the corner trim ahead of the window and unscrew the trim around the door handle and the door panel will pop off enough to get at the three screws holding the Toyota mirror on. The GX has no indictor lights in the mirrors but there are wires to control the mirror movement which will need to be swapped over. Bolt on the new mirrors, fit the electrical leads and refit the trim.

It's been a few weeks since we installed the mirrors, and I am extremely pleased with them. The view of following traffic is much improved over the bolt on version we had, and they are rock steady on rough roads.

Contact msa4x4.com.au for pricing.

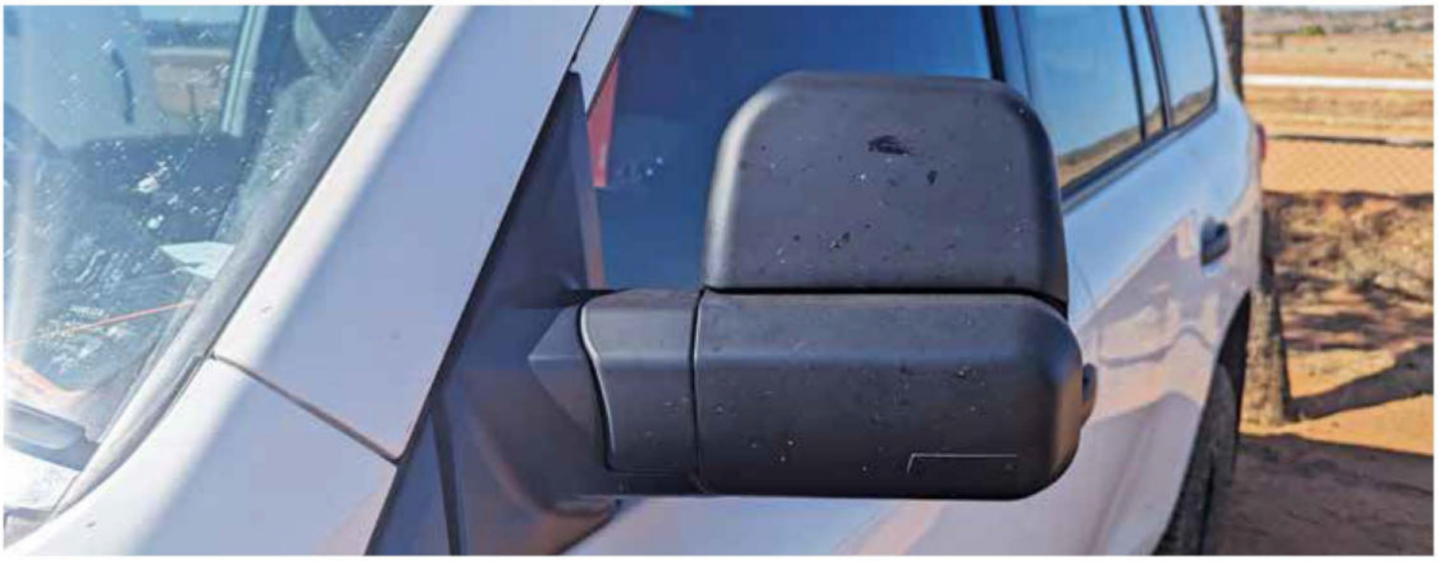


STEP 1 Remove door panel to access fastenings

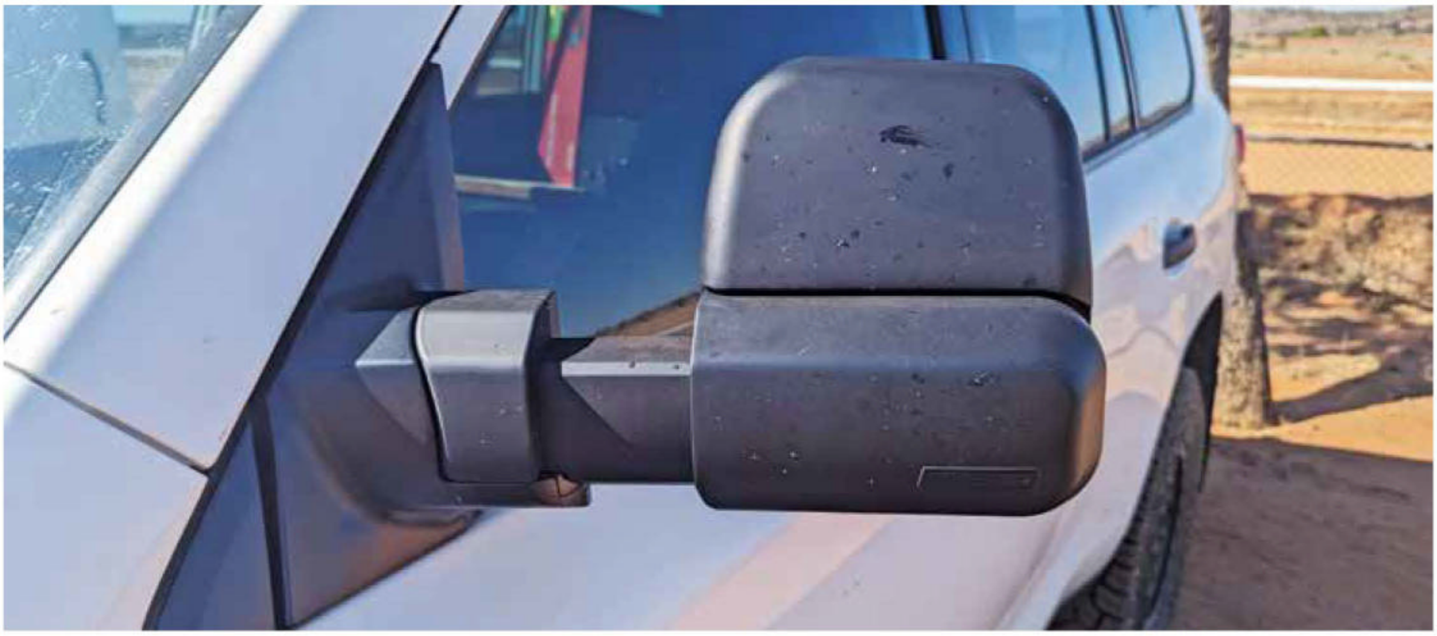


STEP 2 MSA three bolts hold the mirror in place

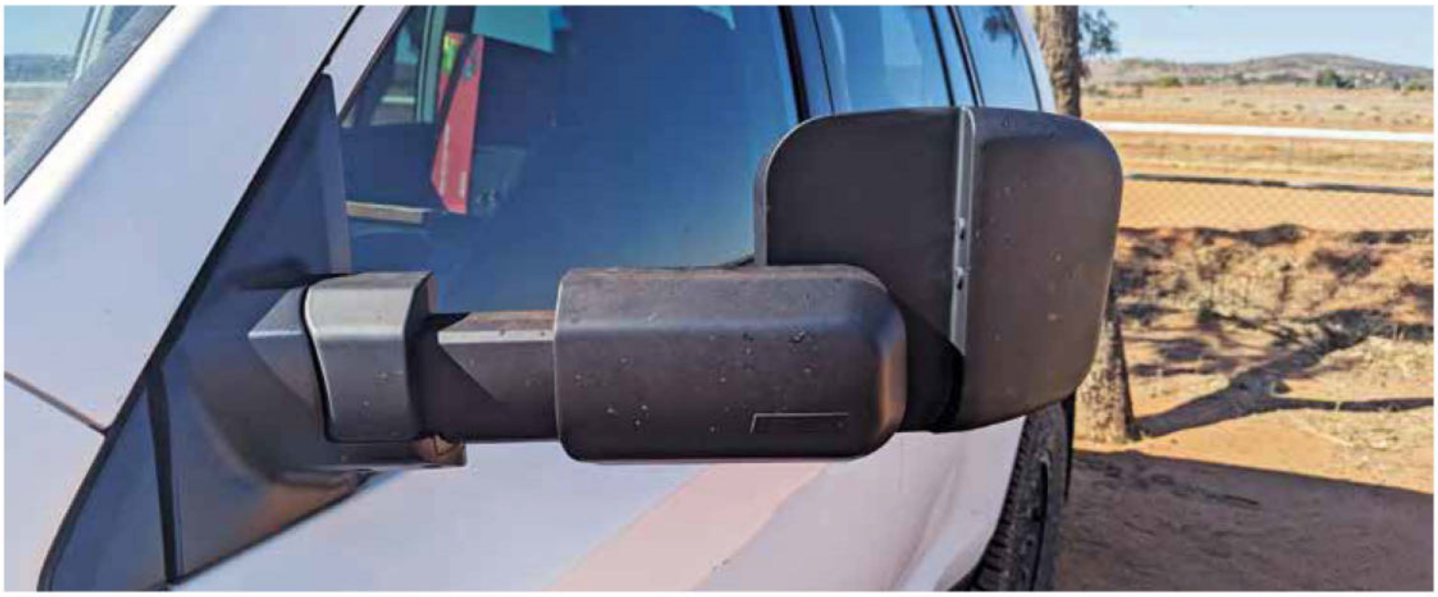
STEP 3 MSA electrical connectors are supplied



STEP 4 Mirror in standard position



STEP 5 Mirror extended



STEP 6 Mirror extended and folded flat

ABOVE Ready for the drawer installation

DRAW ME A PICTURE

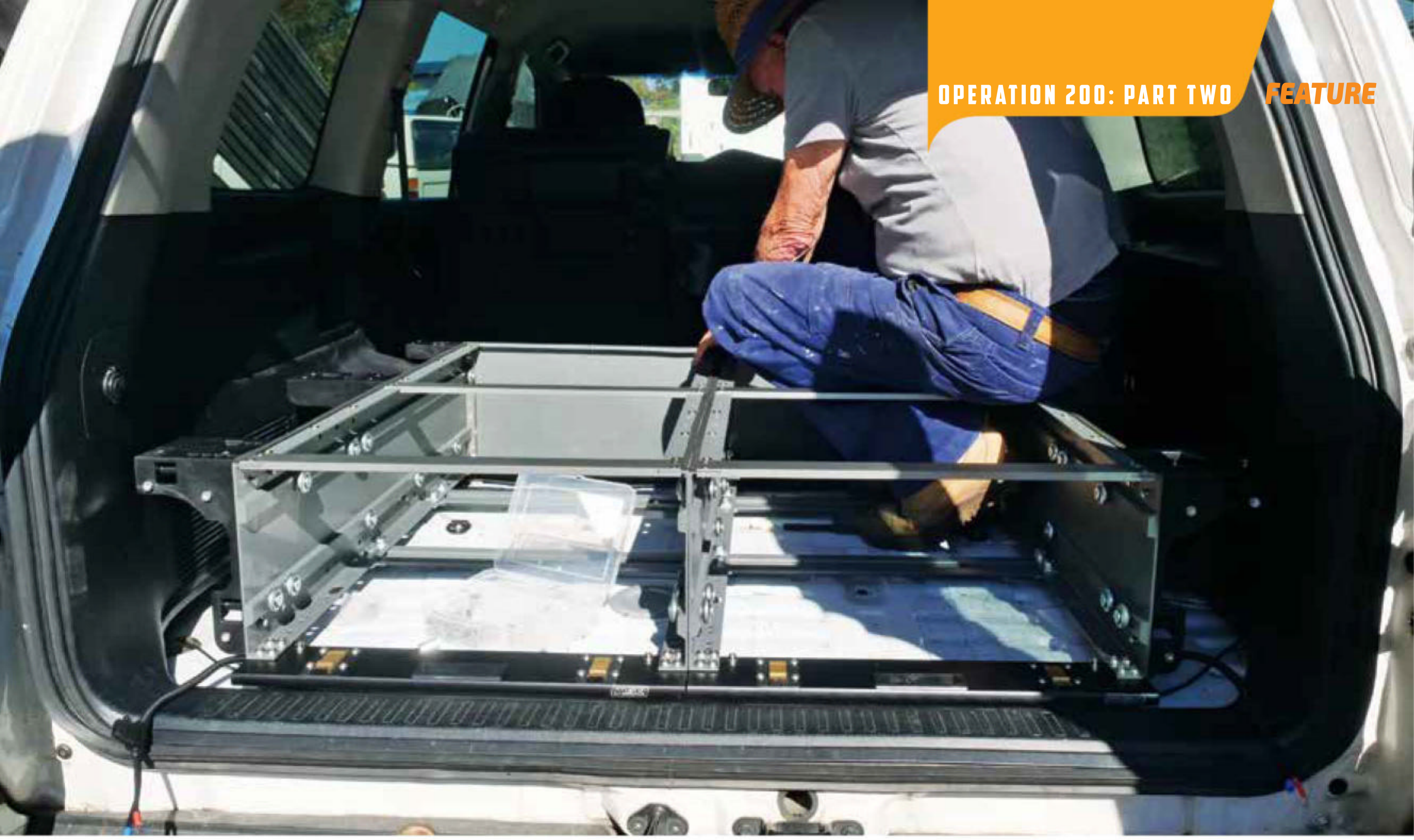
One of the annoying things when travelling is being able to quickly get your hands on all the things we take along with us. It might be a tool, your swimming or fishing gear or the small gas cooker for a quick cuppa. Packing everything in the back of the car and hoping to find it is a big ask. So, now that we have a bigger payload, the next addition on Operation 200 is a set of MSA's aluminium storage drawers. This will give us ample storage and a decent supply of freezer space.

Because the MSA drawers are so well engineered, expect to add around 80kg to the vehicle's weight. My initial reaction when I saw the heavy-duty steel runners and sturdy aluminium frame was that the setup was something of an overkill, but as soon as I realised they are ADR approved and come with a lifetime warranty, the robust engineering made sense. Very clearly, these drawers are made to take a big load and years of tough treatment.

MSA makes a range of storage systems custom made to suit most of the popular 4WDs. We soon discovered the double drawer set for the 200 fitted perfectly and look like they come as original Toyota equipment.

Comprehensive instructions take you through the installation process and the fitting took around three hours. All the hardware is equally robust stainless steel and after fitting the frame we soon had the two drawers in place to be joined together. MSA makes its drawers to suit LandCruisers with

ABOVE Assembling the drawers prior to installation



ABOVE Drawer frames fit perfectly

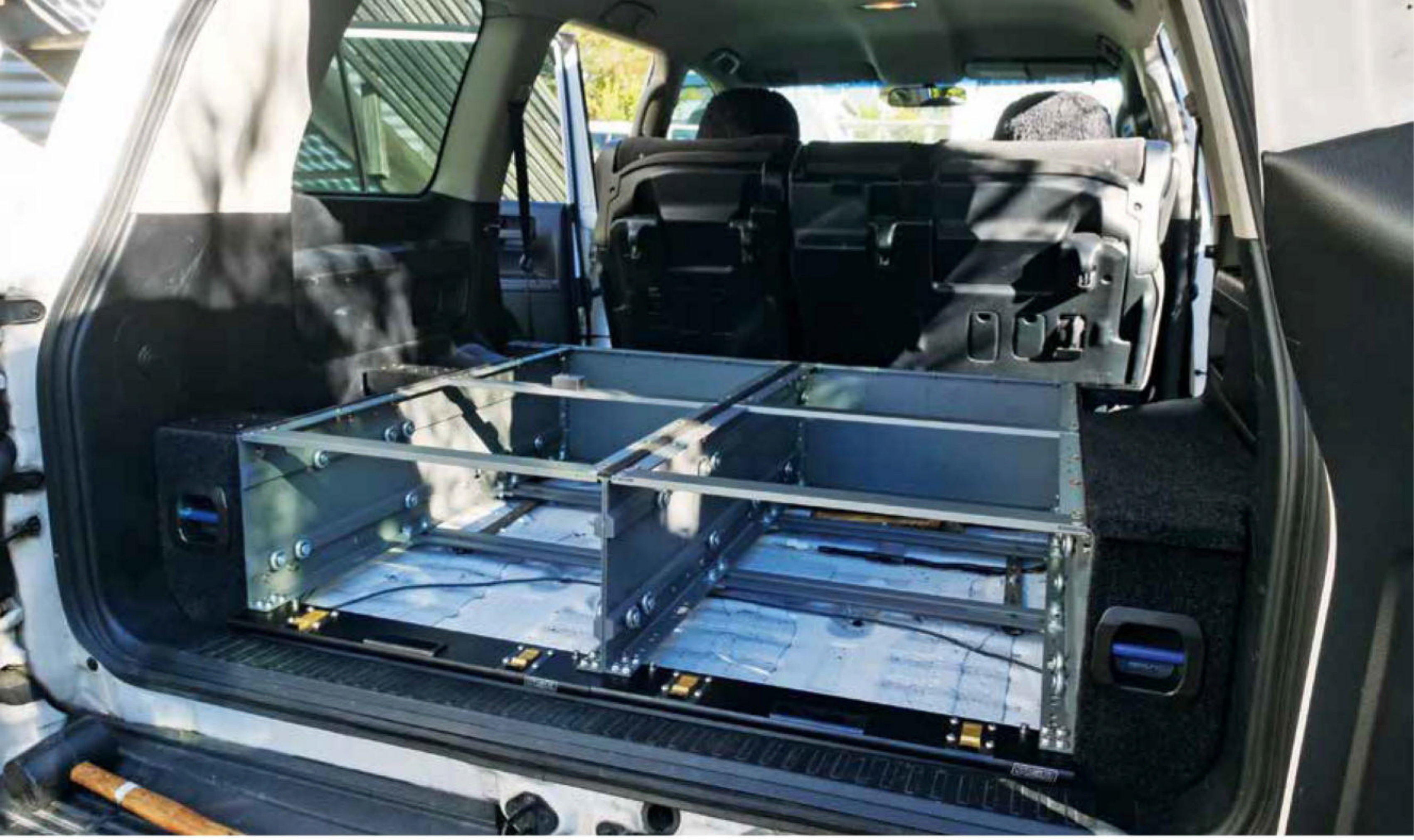
ABOVE Blocks stop the drawers from coming out completely

a third row of seats where the drawer bases bolt to the slots for the seats. As the GX lacks the seats and the standard bolt placement, you will need to talk with your MSA dealer about fitting the system to the 'poor cousin' GX.

A strong marine carpet lined plywood lid covers the rear 'wing' space with two removable lids each side over the void between the drawers and the side of the car. No space is spared for storage. Aluminium C-sections screw on to protect the leading edge and the finished result is remarkably neat.

I liked the way the top of the drawers is level with the folded second row of seats. It means longer items can pack in over the drawers and seat. It also offers a place to sleep for one person in the back of the vehicle if you are looking for a quick overnight camp.

Finishing touches like stay-open automatic latches, dust seals, smooth side walls and LED lights that come on when the drawers are fully opened set the MSA product apart. The stay-open mechanism holds the drawers in place for access even on a 30-degree slope and because they open past the end of the drawer cabinet, it's easy to access everything inside. You can lock them, and the mechanism is designed to be tamper proof. Assembly was around four hours and it's best as a two-person task to lift some of the components into place without scratching the interior. Each drawer can support 250kg and measures 1045mm x 530mm x 275mm,



ABOVE Drawers assemble easily

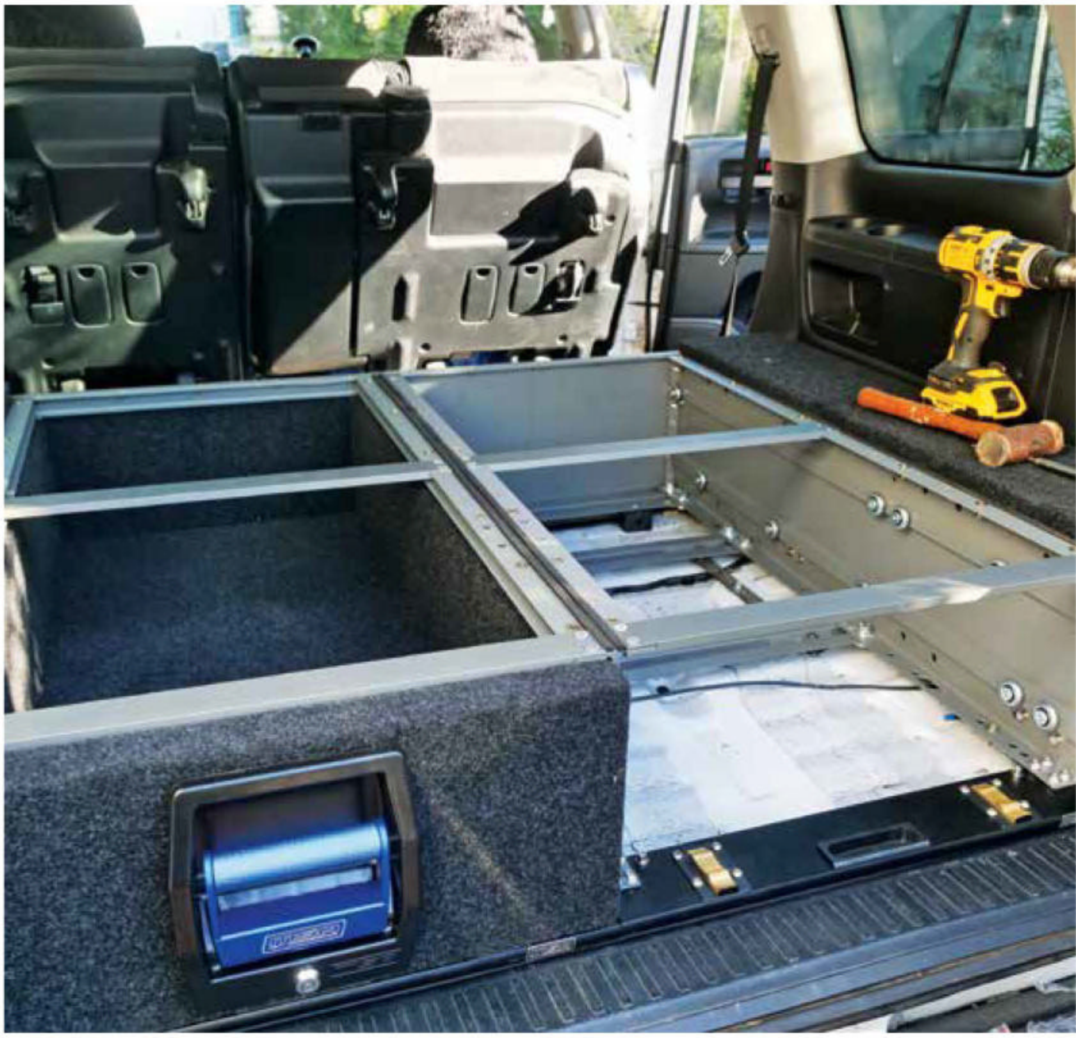
so once fitted the amount of storage is remarkable. I like the height of the storage and the quick access to items right at the back. The 275mm height means plenty of larger items can fit and I included two layers of tools in canvas rolls and a metal 20L jerry can just to test the capacity.

We have taken advantage of the two wing areas for very different outcomes. The driver side now houses a mix of vehicle spares while the passenger side proved to be the perfect place for extra electronics. We will come to how we did it in the next issue, covering how we mounted a house battery and charger to be safely and neatly installed in the bonus side pocket space.

CAGED AND COOL

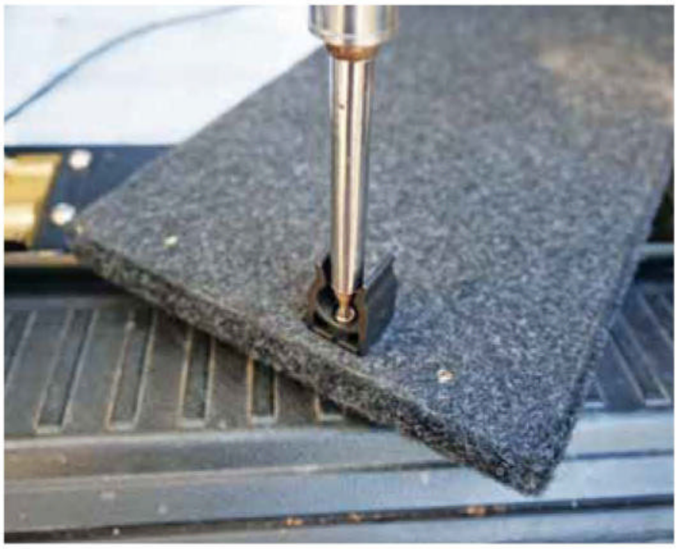
We will report on the 60L myCOOLMAN fridge/freezer later, but the next stage of the build was to fit the suitably sized fridge slide and a protective cage. MSA makes slides and fridge barriers for all popular sizes between 40L and 95L and they are built with the same level of quality and presentation as the drawers. A blue anodised aluminium handle adds to the impressive look and the black powder coated steel frame should continue to look good for years. Again, the warranty is lifetime so you know the engineering is spot on.

With barn doors on the rear of the 200, the logical place for the fridge slide is on the driver side so that often used items like chairs can be reached by opening only the smaller

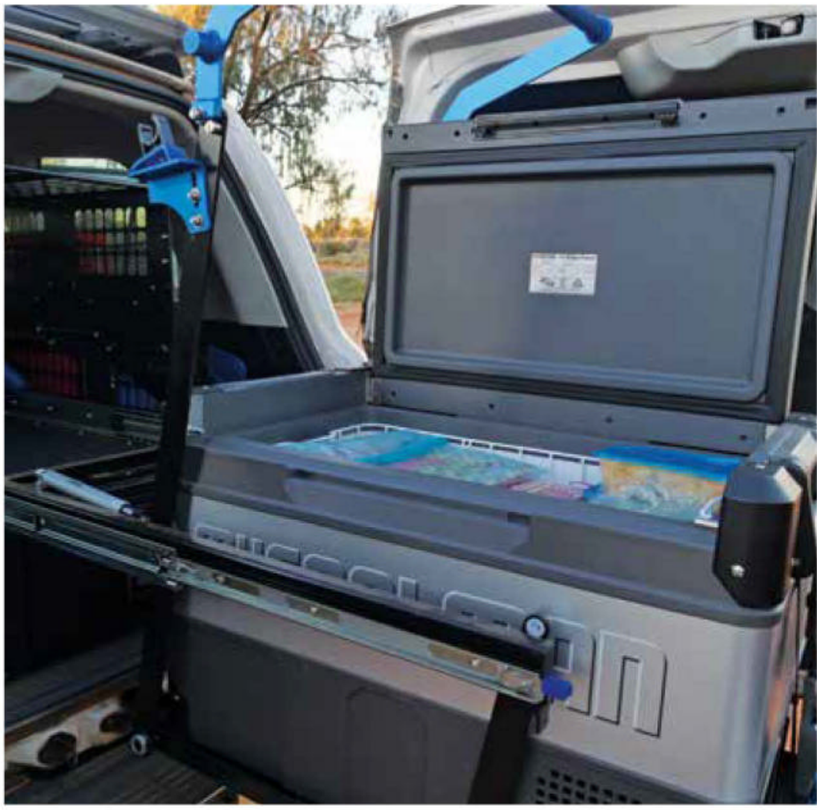


ABOVE Fitting the drawers

> *"The barrier allows packing lots of items around the fridge* without loose gear impeding the air flow"



ABOVE Wing clips are sturdy



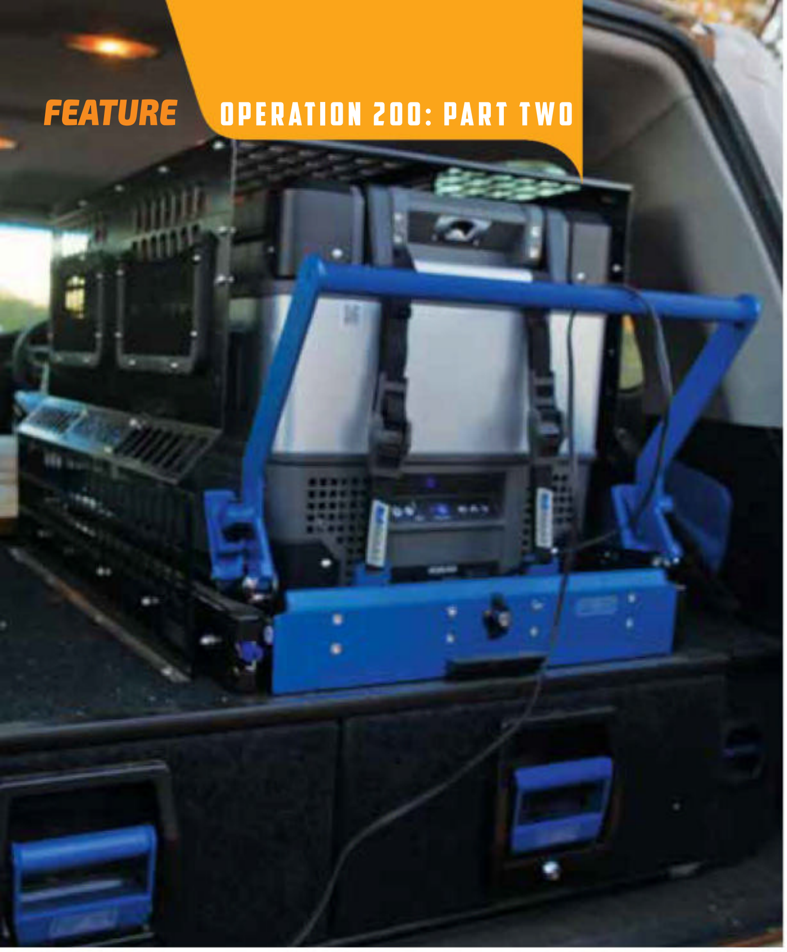
ABOVE The fridge slide lowers horizontally for easy access to the freezer

ABOVE Easy fridge access

passenger side door. We set the slide in place and measured the fridge height and located the assembled fridge barrier on the top of the drawer system. I wanted to make sure there would be access to the driver side storage wings once the whole thing was screwed down. It is important to make sure the slide has plenty of room to move back and fold down and that the back door has clearance when it's closed. It was all pretty obvious once we followed the instructions.

The slide operated smoothly and effortlessly, and it lowers 30cm horizontally for easy access from the side to the freezer contents. A lock prevents the slide from opening until you are ready and keyed travel locks keep your beer supply safe. A set of four tie down straps connect the slide to the fridge handle to keep it in place and to stop any rattles when driving. An added feature is a 400mm x 420mm table in 316 stainless steel that slides out from under the tray. It's a handy place to stack items when loading the fridge or for having a quick cuppa on the road.

The barrier allows packing lots of items around the fridge without loose gear impeding the air flow needed for efficient cooling. It will also protect the fridge from dints and scratches over years of service. Small side pockets are a good place to store smaller items that you use regularly, and a supplied bungee cord will keep the electrical lead clear when sliding the fridge back.



ABOVE The fridge slide

ABOVE Plenty of storage

> *"The drawers operate smoothly* and there's never a problem keeping them open when in use"

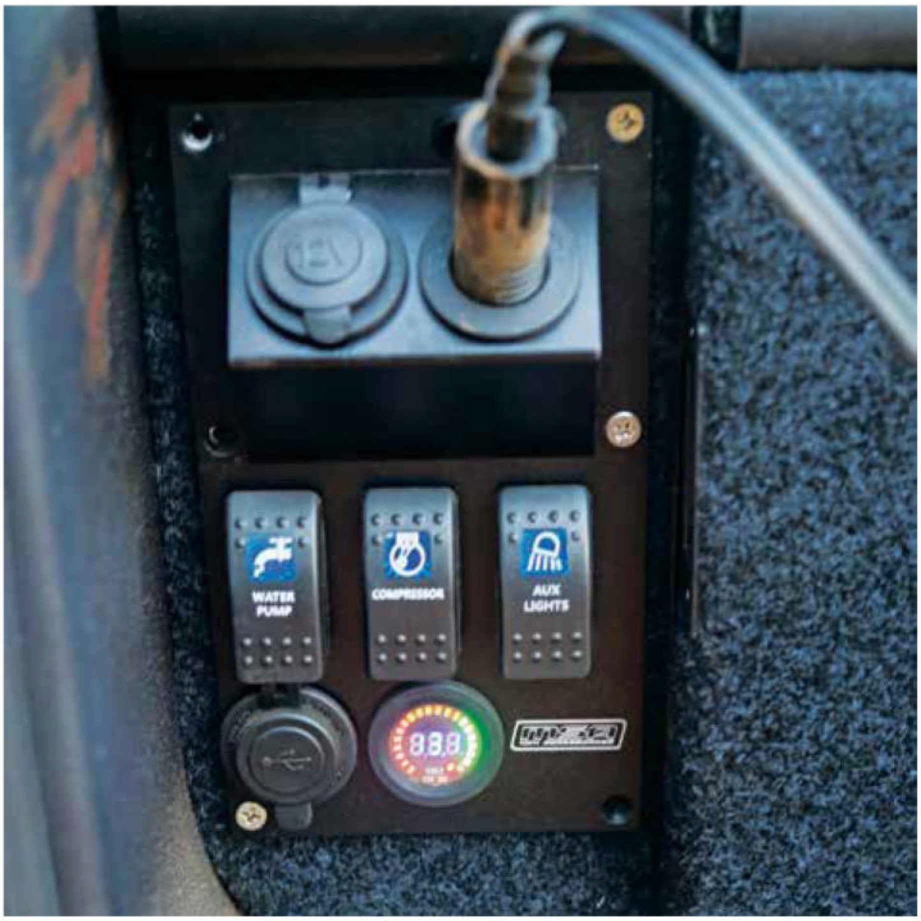
POWER ON HAND

MSA has covered all bases with a custom Power Panel for the side of the drawer system. We installed the prewired panel to the passenger side of the drawers into a pre-cut carpet lined fitting to replace the wing faceplate. The panel fitted seamlessly into place, and we wired the panel into the adjacent stock power outlet. The panel includes three rocker switches for accessories, two USB slots and two cigarette sockets, one of which powers the fridge. I like the way the sockets are angled down so that plugs have more room to the back without fouling on the rear door and how an injected moulded cover protects the back of the wiring panel.

THE WRAP

We have now been on the road with the MSA setup for a few weeks and I remain impressed. The drawers are a real improvement for storage, and I feel we are making the most of our extra weight capacity without going overboard. The drawers operate smoothly and there's never a problem keeping them open when in use. The fridge slide gives quick access to the cold storage and the cage has kept the air circulating effectively.

Go to msa4x4.com.au for pricing and how to order.



ABOVE The drawers' power panel

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MAIN The Pinnacle with Halls Gap village in the background

THE GARDEN OF VICTORIA

Covering more than 167,000 hectares, the Grampians is one of the largest and most popular national parks in Victoria.

Words and Pics **CHRIS WHITELAW**

ABOVE AND BELOW Some of the park's amazing sandstone landscape; This staircase descend into the aptly-named Grand Canyon

The Grampians National Park straddles a brace of spectacular sandstone ranges in central-western Victoria, bounded by highways that connect the towns of Horsham, Stawell, Ararat, Dunkeld and Hamilton. Covering more than 167,000 hectares, the Grampians is one of the largest and most popular national parks in Victoria. In 2006, it was inscribed on Australia's National Heritage List for its Indigenous cultural assets, dramatic landforms and rich natural diversity.

Known to the local Jardwadjali Aboriginal people as 'Gariwerd' (pointed mountains), the ranges were given their European name by explorer Thomas Mitchell in 1836 after their highland counterpart in his native Scotland. Nestled in a valley on the banks of Fyans Creek, the pleasant village of Halls Gap is the local hub for tourists and day-trippers who flock to the ranges for outdoor adventuring that includes hiking, rock climbing, camping and aquatic sports on lakes and reservoirs.

The physical landscape

The Grampians' geological fabric began forming about 430 million years ago when sand, silt and mud were laid down to a depth of 7km on the floor of an ancient sea. Pressure and heat transformed these sediments into layers of rock that were later warped and titled by tectonic forces and intruded by veins of volcanic granite.

Weathering of softer sediments and erosion along fault lines sculpted the Grampians into a series of north-south orientated ridges with long western slopes rising to escarpments that plunge steeply off their eastern edges. The highest of the park's craggy peaks is Mt William (1168m), which towers over a spectacular landscape of massive cliffs, deeply fissured plateaux and rocky outcrops that contrast markedly with the surrounding Mallee and Wimmera plains.

The Grampians collect abundant rainfall and almost three-quarters of the park is designated as a Special Water Supply Catchment Area. Between the ridges, heavily timbered valleys embrace creeks that rush across sandstone terraces and majestic cascades to feed tributaries of several rivers – the Wannon, Glenelg, Wimmera and Hopkins – and fill man-made reservoirs. High-quality water harvested from the Grampians supplies towns and farms in the Wimmera Mallee districts and is fundamental to their economies.

Several waterfalls make interesting highlights for bushwalks and scenic drives through the central ranges. MacKenzie Falls is one of the largest and most spectacular waterfalls in Victoria and the only one in the Grampians that flows all year round. Other beautiful cascades include Silverband, Broken and Fish Falls that showcase the impressive terraces and rock formations within their gorges.

> ***"The Grampians' geological fabric began forming about 430 million years ago"***

ABOVE Walking through ancient rock formations

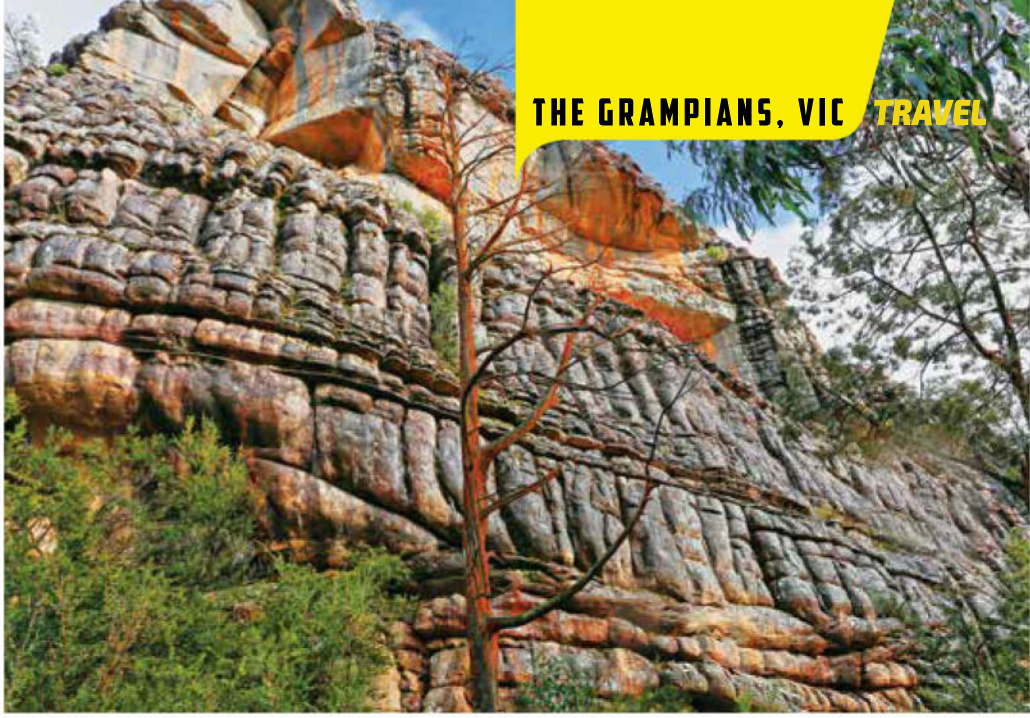
> *“The ranges harbour 975 native plant species – one-third of the state’s total flora – many of which are rare or threatened and found only within the national park”*

The natural environment

The Grampians experience cool wet winters and hot dry summers, a varied climate that supports a wide range of plant communities, including eucalypt forests, heathlands, grassy plains and fern gullies. Known as the ‘Garden of Victoria’, the ranges harbour 975 native plant species – one-third of the state’s total flora – many of which are rare or threatened and found only within the national park. Notable among this floral panoply are 75 kinds of orchids and an array of wildflowers that provide a colourful display in spring.

The varied topography and diverse plant communities provide habitats for a host of native animal species: 230 birds, 40 mammals, 30 reptiles, 11 amphibians and six native fish. Of these, 50 are classified as threatened and are afforded special protection by state legislation and international agreements.

ABOVE AND BELOW The view of Lake Bellfield from The Pinnacle; Wildflowers adorn the bush throughout the year



Indigenous culture

Gariwerd lies within the traditional lands of the Jardwadjali and Djab Wurrung Aboriginal people, who lived in the ranges for at least 22,000 years before the arrival of Europeans. Evidence of their presence exists at many sites, especially rock shelters, which contain hearths, grind stones, implements and scattered quartz flakes. Elsewhere, quarries and scarred trees speak of artisanship in stone and wood. As well as meeting their physical needs, the mountains were an integral part of a Dreaming culture featuring the great ancestor spirit Bunjil, who created much of the landscape in western Victoria.

The rich tapestry of Indigenous life and culture is displayed in rock art at 200 known sites in and around the mountains. Comprising an estimated 90 per cent of the state's rock art, Gariwerd is believed to contain the largest concentration of Indigenous paintings in southern Australia. The artworks depict more than 4,000 different motifs, including human figures and hands, animal tracks and birds.

Some of the most notable sites are accessible by the public: Gulgurn Manja (Flat Rock) and Ngamadjidj (Cave of Ghosts) in the northern Grampians, Manja (Cave of Hands) and Billimina Shelter in the west, Jananginj Njani (Camp of the Emu's Foot), Manja Larngibunja (Cave of Fishes), and Bunjil's Shelter near Stawell.

European history

Major Thomas Mitchell was the first European to explore the Grampians during his 1836 expedition in western Victoria. Though generally unsuitable for farming, Mitchell's reports on the area soon attracted drovers and settlers for grazing cattle. The first of these was Charles Browning Hall who established a run in 1841 where Lake Bellfield Reservoir is now located. By following aboriginal tracks, he discovered the gap in the ranges which now bears his name. Roses Gap is named after Philip Rose who took over Hall's run in 1842.

Not surprisingly, settlers found it difficult to graze cattle in the mountainous terrain and exploitation of the ranges switched to their natural resources of timber, stone, water and gold. Timber-getting and sawmilling began in the early 1870s, harvesting the abundant hardwoods for railway sleepers, construction lumber and fencing. After the national park was declared in 1984, timber operations were phased out and eventually ceased 10 years

ABOVE AND BELOW Sandstone cliffs are on display at every turn; The trailhead for the walk to The Pinnacle

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later. In the late 1870s, the Mount Difficult (Heatherlie) Quarry was opened north of Halls Gap, producing high-quality sandstone for major public works and civic buildings in Stawell and Melbourne. The site contains many relics from this era and is included on the Victorian Heritage Register.

In 1875, the borough engineer, John D'Alton, embarked on a project to supply Stawell with water from the Grampians. The system was completed over the next six years, incorporating a weir on Fyans Creek from which water was conveyed by a network of flumes, pipelines and a tunnel cut through the Mt William Range.

At the south-eastern edge of the national park, the locality of Mafeking was the site of Victoria's last gold rush in 1900. For 12 years after timber splitters first discovered alluvial gold in a gully, prospectors worked claims over the surrounding creeks that yielded a ton of gold worth an estimated 100,000 pounds. A leisurely walk around the overgrown streets of the former township reveals the well-preserved remains of the diggings and hydraulic sluicing at Brownings mine site.

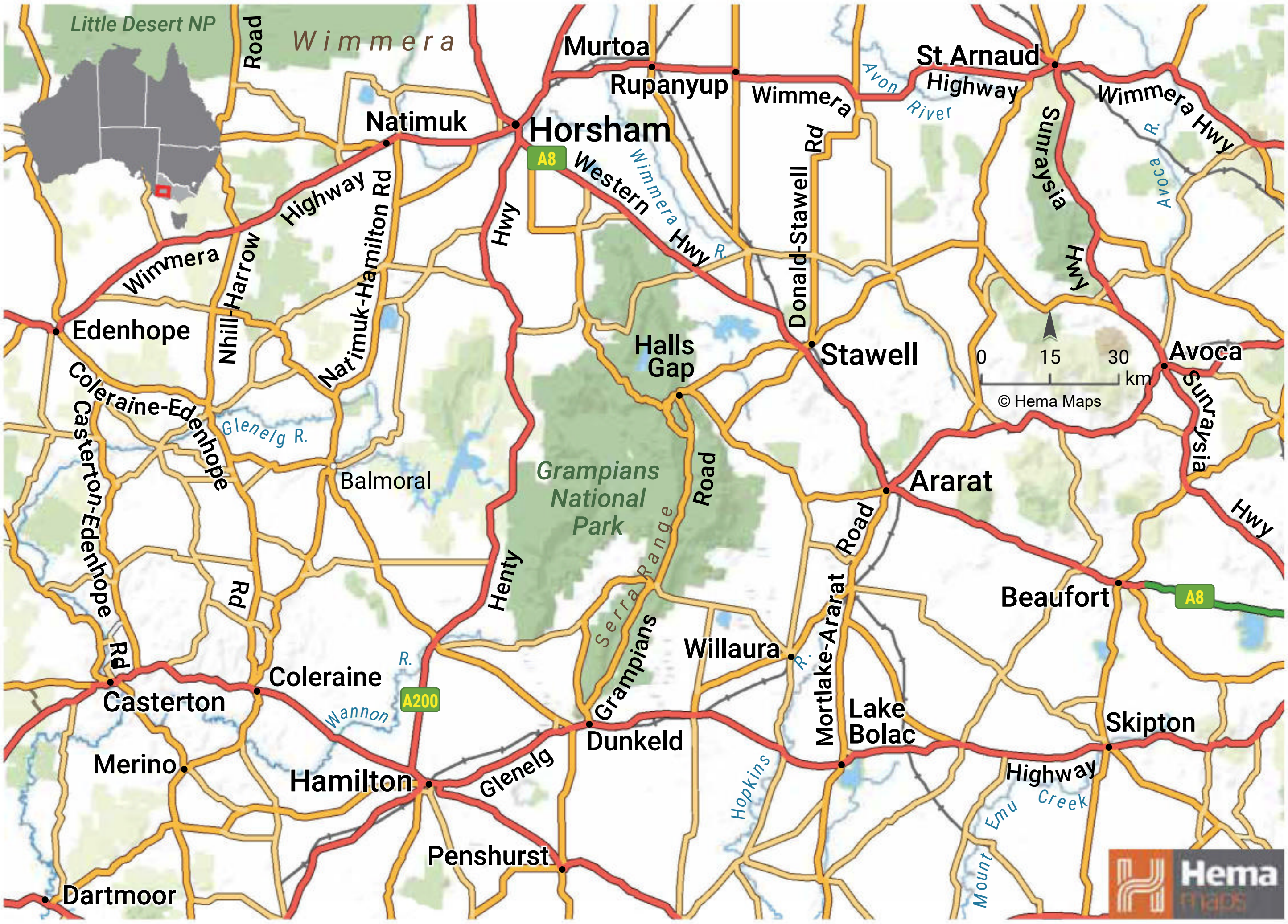
Tourism and recreation

Tourism in the Grampians has its roots in the 1890s with the construction of holiday homes and guest houses and the creation of a camping reserve. The mountains' popularity as a tourist destination was enhanced during the 1920s by the extension of railways to Stawell, Ararat and Dunkeld, and the construction of roads to accommodation and recreation facilities at Halls Gap.

In 1923, naturalist and beekeeper Walter Zumstein opened a retreat for holidaymakers on the banks of the Mackenzie River. Today, Zumsteins Historic Area is one of the best attractions along Mt Victory Road, with picnic shelters and barbecues, walking trails and interpretive signs to guide visitors through the scenic grounds of the old settlement.

The Grampians continues to draw tourists – estimated at more than 1.3 million annually – for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities including bushwalking, camping, scenic driving, rock climbing and fishing.

The national park is permeated by numerous walking trails spanning scores of kilometres, ranging from short strolls to suit


Little Desert NP
Wimmera
Murtoa
Rupanyup
St Arnaud
Wimmera
Avon River
Highway
Wimmera Hwy
Natimuk
Horsham
A8
Western Hwy
Wimmera R
Donald-Stawell Rd
Sunraysia Hwy
Avoca R.
Road
Highway
Wimmera
Nhill-Harrow
Natimuk-Hamilton Rd
Hwy
Edenhope
Halls Gap
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Avoca
Sunraysia Hwy
Coleraine-Edenhope
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Balmoral
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Henty
Rd
Beaufort
A8
Grampians
Willaura
Mortlake-Ararat
R.
Coleraine
R.
Casterton
Wannon
A200
Lake Bolac
Skipton
Dunkeld
Merino
Hamilton
Glenelg
Hopkins
Highway
Emu Creek
Mount
Penshurst
Dartmoor
Hema maps

“Numerous walking trails range from short strolls to suit young families to multi-day treks for fit and experienced hikers”

ABOVE AND BELOW The Pinnacle Lookout provides a jaw-dropping view of the valley below; Bridal Veil Falls on the way to The Pinnacle

young families to multi-day treks for fit and experienced hikers.

Close to the tourist hub at Halls Gap, day walks explore the aptly named Wonderland Range to the Grand Canyon, Bridal Veil Falls, the Pinnacle (715m), the Balconies and Mackenzie Falls. Medium length walks to Sundial Peak and Mt Rosea thread through open forest decked in spring wildflowers, up the Grand Stairway to the Gate of the East Wind and lookouts with panoramic views of the Fyans Creek valley and Lake Bellfield.

In the Mt Difficult Range of the Northern Grampians easy walks access several Aboriginal rock art sites, while more challenging day walks climb to several exposed mountain peaks. The Mt Stapylton track meanders through forested gullies and scrambles over rocky outcrops to the summit with sweeping views over the ranges to the south.

The Southern Grampians, incorporating the Mt William, Serra and Victoria Ranges, offer short walks to Aboriginal rock shelters and harder bushwalks through remote and rugged terrain. The ascent of Mt William is made easier by a sealed road that reaches almost to the top, leaving a short, steep walk through stunted, sub-alpine vegetation to a windswept pinnacle with a 360-degree view of the jagged ranges and open plains.

For those inclined to less strenuous pastimes, swimming, boating and canoeing are available at Lake Wartook, Lake Bellfield and Moora Moora Reservoir. Fishing is also very popular in the reservoirs or in one of the park’s many streams and creeks.

The Grampians’ folded terrain, forested slopes and breathtaking views make these ranges an excellent venue for scenic driving. An extensive network of bitumen roads and unsealed tracks make touring in the national park easy and enjoyable. Main roads provide 2WD access to all the major attractions for most of the year and routes through scenic corridors can be combined to fill a day of driving pleasure with picnic and walking stops along the way.

There are also plenty of opportunities to head off the beaten track and explore the more remote and less-visited areas of the park. Most 4WD tracks in the ranges are rated medium and while they are not difficult or challenging in dry conditions, they may become so after rain. Some roads are seasonally closed, generally from mid-June to the end of October, or may be temporarily inaccessible due to unpredictable weather. Before heading offroad, it’s a good idea to check on current road conditions at the national park office or visitor centre in Halls Gap.

FAST FACTS

Getting there:
- The national park lies between Stawell and Horsham on the Western Highway and Dunkeld on the Glenelg Highway, 260km west of Melbourne.
- It's easily accessible by 2WD vehicles but access may be limited by local flooding after heavy rain.

Best time to visit: In spring when the wildflowers bloom and the waterfalls flow.

Fuel and supplies: At Hamilton, Dunkeld, Ararat, Stawell, Horsham and Halls Gap.

Camping:
- 14 vehicle-based campgrounds with designated campsites and basic facilities including toilets, fireplaces and picnic tables — advance bookings are required and fees apply.
- Remote, walk-in camping at sites for overnight hikes — no bookings taken and no fees apply.

Other accommodation:
- A wide range of accommodation is available in Halls Gap and nearby towns, including cottages, B&Bs, motels and caravan parks.

See and do:
- Scenic driving, four-wheel driving
- Bushwalking, rock climbing, abseiling, cycling, mountain biking, fishing, boating, swimming
- Aboriginal rock art
- MacKenzie and Silverband Falls
- Zumsteins Historic Area
- The Pinnacle

More info:
Parks Victoria
- P: 13 19 63
- W: parks.vic.gov.au

Grampians Visitor Information Centre
- 117 Grampians Road, Halls Gap
- P: 1800 065 599 or (03) 5361 4444
- W: visitgrampians.com.au

> *"Nestled in a valley on the banks of Fyans Creek, the pleasant village of Halls Gap is the local hub for tourists and day-trippers"*

Camping and accommodation

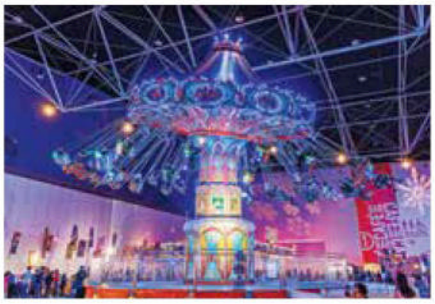
To get the most out of a trip to the Grampians, you'll need to spend a few days to fully explore its many attractions, and visitors are spoilt for choice when it comes to overnight accommodation. The national park offers unpowered camping at 14 campgrounds with designated sites and basic facilities that include toilets, fireplaces and picnic tables. Many of these are suitable for caravans, camper trailers and motorhomes. There is also a wide range of privately-owned accommodation that includes several caravan parks, motels, B&Bs, cabins and chalets catering to couples, families and large groups. The Grampians are also accessible for day trips from the nearby towns of Horsham, Stawell, Ararat and Dunkeld, where fuel and supplies are readily available.

ABOVE AND BELOW The Visitor Information Centre; The Grampians make a stunning backdrop to the Halls Gap village

WHAT'S ON

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Huon Valley Mid-Winter Fest; Moama Lights; School's Out Winter Fest; Australian Festival of Chamber Music

MOAMA LIGHTS



NSW

Splendour in the Grass Music and Arts Festival

21–23 July 2023

The 21st annual Splendour in the Grass Music and Arts Festival will bring the word's most prolific artists and national music treasures to Ngarindjin/North Byron Parklands from Friday, 21 July – Sunday, 23 July 2023. Onsite camping is accessible from Wednesday, 19 July. For more information and tickets visit *www.splendourinthegrass.com.*

Moama Lights

30 June – 23 July 2023

The Murray River Council's award-winning Moama Lights is a sound and light trail sharing stories from across the region through state-of-the-art installations, projections and cutting-edge moving light technology. This year will feature an outdoor ice-skating rink, the American Hotel beer garden, food trucks and kids' entertainment. Purchase tickets now to avoid missing out: *www.123tix.com.au/events/profile/1756.*

VIC

Truffle Hunt at Gembrook Truffles

8 July and 23 July 2023

Enjoy a morning or afternoon of truffle hunting with truffle dog 'Willow' on the family farm in Gembrook, just an hour's drive from Melbourne's CBD. To organise a hunt, head over to the Gembrook Truffles website: *www.gembrooktruffles.com.au.*

Echuca-Moama Winter Blues Festival

27–30 July 2023

The Echuca-Moama Winter Blues Festival is back for 2023 featuring an impressive line-up of Australian blues artists. The festival began as a small afternoon pub event with a handful of bands, but now in its 24th year, it is a four-day homage to the blues scene, spread across more than 20 venues in the town of Echuca, Victoria. Entry is free. To find out more, head online: *www.winterblues.com.au.*

TAS

Huon Valley Mid-Winter Festival

14–15 July

The Huon Valley Mid-Winter Festival at Willie Smith's Apple Shed is all about celebrating the region's apple-picking history and at its core is the wassail: the ages-old tradition of scaring evil spirits from the orchard to bring on a bumper crop. Enjoy the Big Willie Burning Man, Tassie folk-funk bands, a costume competition, storytellers and, of course, the wassail. For more information or to purchase tickets, head to *www.williesmiths.com.au/mid-winter.*

SA

Winter Reds Weekend

28–30 July

One of the most beautiful ways to enjoy the Adelaide Hills is on a cold wintery weekend, the rain pelting the window of a rustic cellar door, a fire roaring, a glass of shiraz, pinot noir or even tempranillo in hand and a bowl of warming, slow-cooked nourishment on your lap. For more information head to *www.adelaidehillswine.com.au/events/winter-reds.*

WA

School's Out Winter Fest

1–16 July 2023

Embrace the magic as the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre transforms into a winter wonderland, with everything from ice-skating to snow slides, falling snow and carnival rides to enjoy. This all-inclusive event has something for everyone. Bookings are essential: *www.schoolsoutfest.com.au.*

NT

Territory Day

1 July 2023

Territory Day is the celebration of the NT becoming self-governed. Each year on the first of July, Territorians are treated to concerts and fireworks to join in the celebrations. To find out more about the 2023 festivities, head online: *https://territoryday.nt.gov.au*

Desert Harmony Festival

28–30 July 2023

The Desert Harmony Festival in Tennant Creek is a celebration of the region's diverse communities and rich artistic traditions. Enjoy four days of festivities including music, dance, visual arts and film. To find out more, visit *www.barklyarts.com.au/event/desert-harmony-festival-2023.*

QLD

Jumpers and Jazz in July

20–30 July 2023

Jumpers and Jazz in July is Queensland's quirkiest yarnbombing and jazz winter festival, bringing together a program of over 100 experiences across the region during the event. Head online for the full program and ticketed events: *www.jumpersandjazz.com.au.*

Australian Festival of Chamber Music

28 July – 6 August 2023

The Australian Festival of Chamber Music is a unique 10-day event that entertains and moves audiences with its variety of concerts, stunning line-up of international and Australian musicians and friendly atmosphere. Tickets are on sale now at *www.afcm.com.au.*

TOASTIES THREE WAYS

Grease the skillet, we've got you toasted!

Words Anji Bignell **Pics** Supplied

BARBECUE BRISKET BUTTY

TOTAL TIME: 25 minutes
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- Butter
- 8 slices sourdough bread
- 12 slices cheddar cheese
- Leftover brisket
- Gherkins, sliced lengthwise
- Barbecue sauce

METHOD

Butter each side of the bread and top one side of the toastie with three slices of cheese, a serving of leftover brisket that has been pulled with a fork, three slices of gherkins and a squirt of barbecue sauce.

Place a slice of bread on top. Repeat with remaining ingredients.

Heat a skillet on medium-high heat over the fire and melt two knobs of butter on it.

Place each toastie on the skillet over medium-high heat; flatten down with a spatula and toast until golden brown then flip over and cook until the cheese has melted.

CLUB SANDWICH

TOTAL TIME: 25 minutes
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- Butter
- 8 slices white bread
- 8 slices turkey breast
- 8-12 bacon rashers, cooked crispy
- 4 slices Swiss cheese
- Mayonnaise
- Mustard

METHOD

Butter each side of the bread and top one side of the toastie with turkey, crispy bacon, cheese, mayonnaise and mustard.

Place a slice of bread on top. Repeat with remaining ingredients.

Heat a skillet on medium-high heat over the fire and melt two knobs of butter on it.

Place each toastie on the skillet over medium-high heat; flatten down with a spatula and toast until golden brown then flip over and cook until the cheese has melted.

NUTELLA TOASTIE

TOTAL TIME: 25 minutes
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 4 free range eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 1 tbsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 8 slices white bread
- 8 tbsp Nutella
- Butter, for frying
- Optional whipped cream, fruit and maple syrup

METHOD

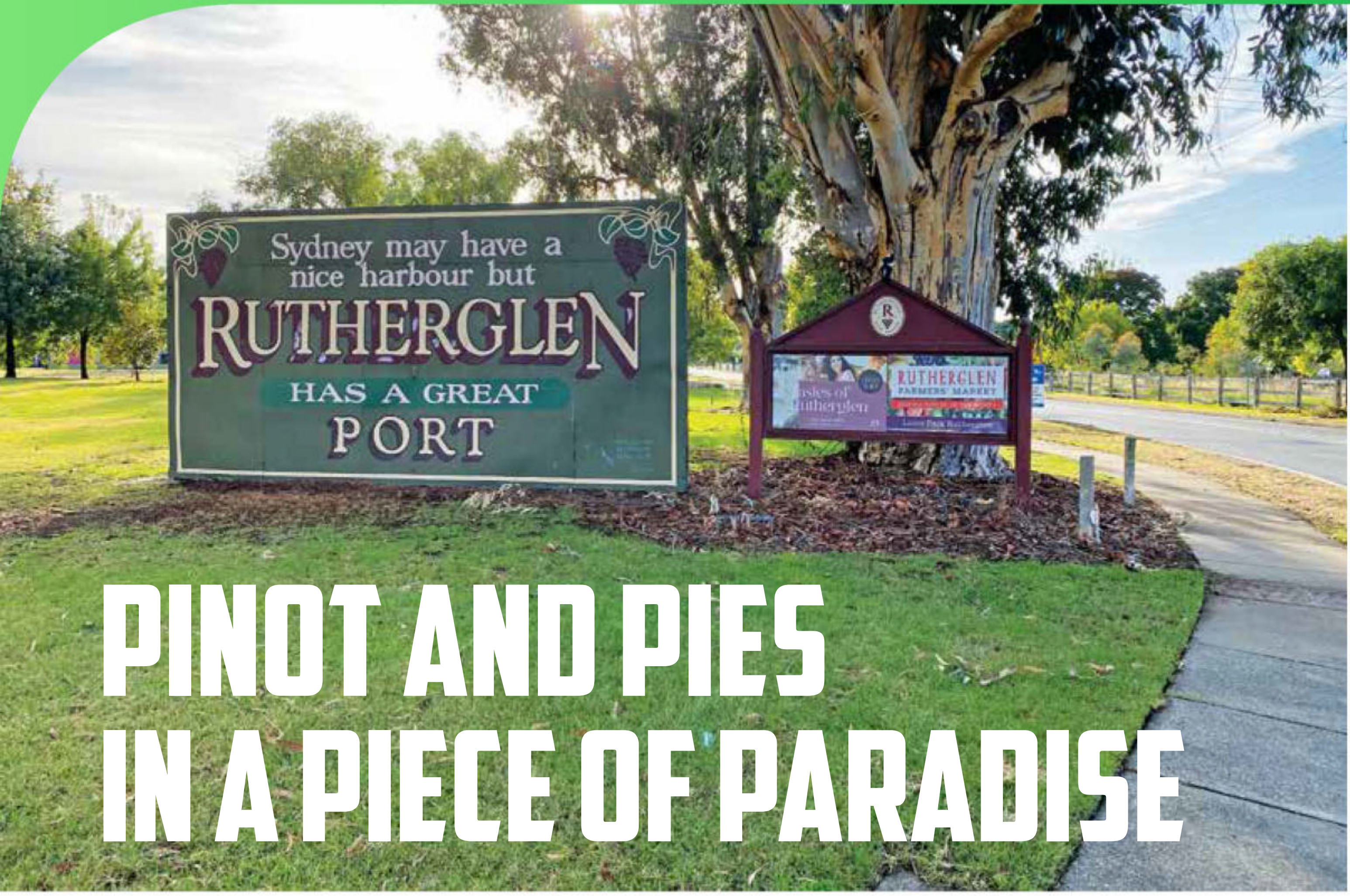
Mix eggs, milk, cinnamon and vanilla in a bowl.

Lay out bread and add a thick layer of Nutella (around one tablespoon) to each piece of bread, sandwich them together and press down.

Melt two large knobs of butter on a frying pan or skillet over a medium-high heat fire.

Dip each sandwich in the egg mix and place on the frying pan or skillet. Cook each side until crispy and golden brown.

Serve with whipped cream, fruit and maple syrup as an option.



PINOT AND PIES IN A PIECE OF PARADISE

Just 30 minutes or so detour off the Hume Highway, not far from the border in north-east Victoria, Rutherglen is a small country town that punches way above its weight.

Words and Pics
ALLISON WATT

I've lost count of the number of years we have made the pilgrimage to the Tastes of Rutherglen wine festival held over Victoria's Labour Day long weekend in March – I think it's 22, but it could be 23.

Each year we hook up our van and, with a group of friends, descend on the Rutherglen Caravan and Tourist Park to enjoy a decadent three days of wine drinking and gourmet food eating in brilliant autumn sunshine.

In doing some research for this piece, I found a newspaper article that reported that the first Rutherglen Wine Festival was held in 1967. Word soon got out and by 1970 Melburnians were rushing up the Hume and the population of the town swelled to 20,000 over the festival weekend. Accommodation within 100km was booked out. The town had seen nothing like it since the gold rush.

From all accounts, it was a wild weekend with 2500 gallons – more than 11,000 litres and well over 100,000 standard drinks – being consumed. The streets were awash with drunken youths. It was back in the days when drink driving seemed acceptable and sadly there were eight car accidents and four fatalities recorded on the roads around Rutherglen.

ABOVE AND BELOW Entry sign when you enter the town; Rutherglen's giant wine bottle

These days, Tastes of Rutherglen is a far more civilised affair. As many as 20 of the multitude of local wineries will offer a food and wine pairing, mostly in outdoor settings overlooking creeks and vineyards, often with live music and other activities thrown in. There's a terrific bus system to ferry tipplers around the region.

Rutherglen's wine history is thought to date back to sometime in the mid-to-late 1850s when Lindsay Brown planted a four-acre vineyard on his 'Gooramadda Run'. The Brown name is synonymous with Australian winemaking – the famous Brown Brothers is not far away in Victoria's King Valley and the extended Brown family today runs All Saints and St Leonards in nearby Wahgunyah.

Today, Rutherglen – renowned for its reds and fortifieds – is considered an international wine industry player, boasting some of the largest estates in the world.

Many wineries established at this time are still flourishing today, including Gehrigs (1859), Chambers Rosewood (1859), Morris (1859), St Leonards (1860), All Saints Estate (1864), Campbells (1870) and Stanton & Killeen (1875).

Rutherglen is not pretentious wine country – a lot of these wineries are small boutique operations where you'll taste their delightful reds and fortifieds in a rusty tin shed or a historic red brick homestead while patting the wine dogs.

Rutherglen wineries are open year-round but host two events per year – Tastes of Rutherglen in March and Winery Walkabout on the King's Birthday long weekend in June.

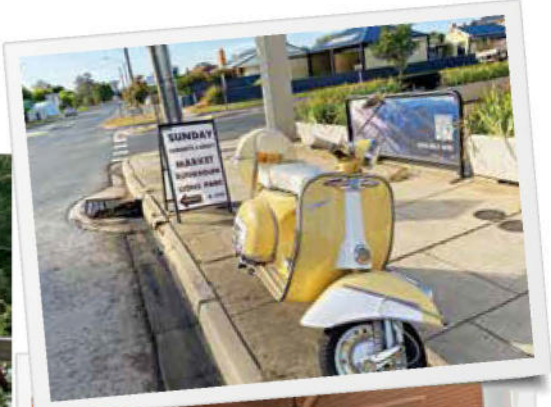
But if wine is not your thing, Rutherglen still has plenty to offer. The caravan park overlooks the pretty King Lake, is right next door to the golf course and the public swimming pool and is just one block away from the bustling main street of town with its many historic shopfronts still on display.

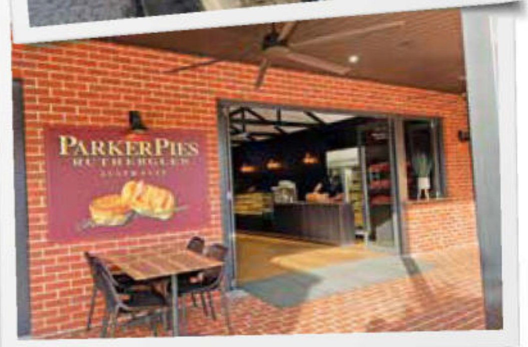
The town boasts three pubs – the Victoria, Poachers Paradise and the Star – all of which serve good meals and local wines. There is an array of boutiques, gift stores, cafes and wine bars along the main street, as well as an IGA, newsagent and chemist. You can spend hours in Tapsell's secondhand bookstore – and I often do – and there is a terrific display of vintage motorbikes and cars at the Caffeine n Machine cafe which was once a mechanics workshop.

No visit to Rutherglen is complete without a visit to Parker Pies – famous throughout this region and beyond for its wide offering of delicious homemade pies and pastries including everything from buffalo, emu, venison and kangaroo, through to more basic beef, lamb, chicken and vego. You can buy them frozen to take away, so every visit we stock up.

Not to be outdone by other towns which have 'giant' icons, Rutherglen has its own giant wine bottle located at the highest point in town and from which there is a stunning view over the countryside.

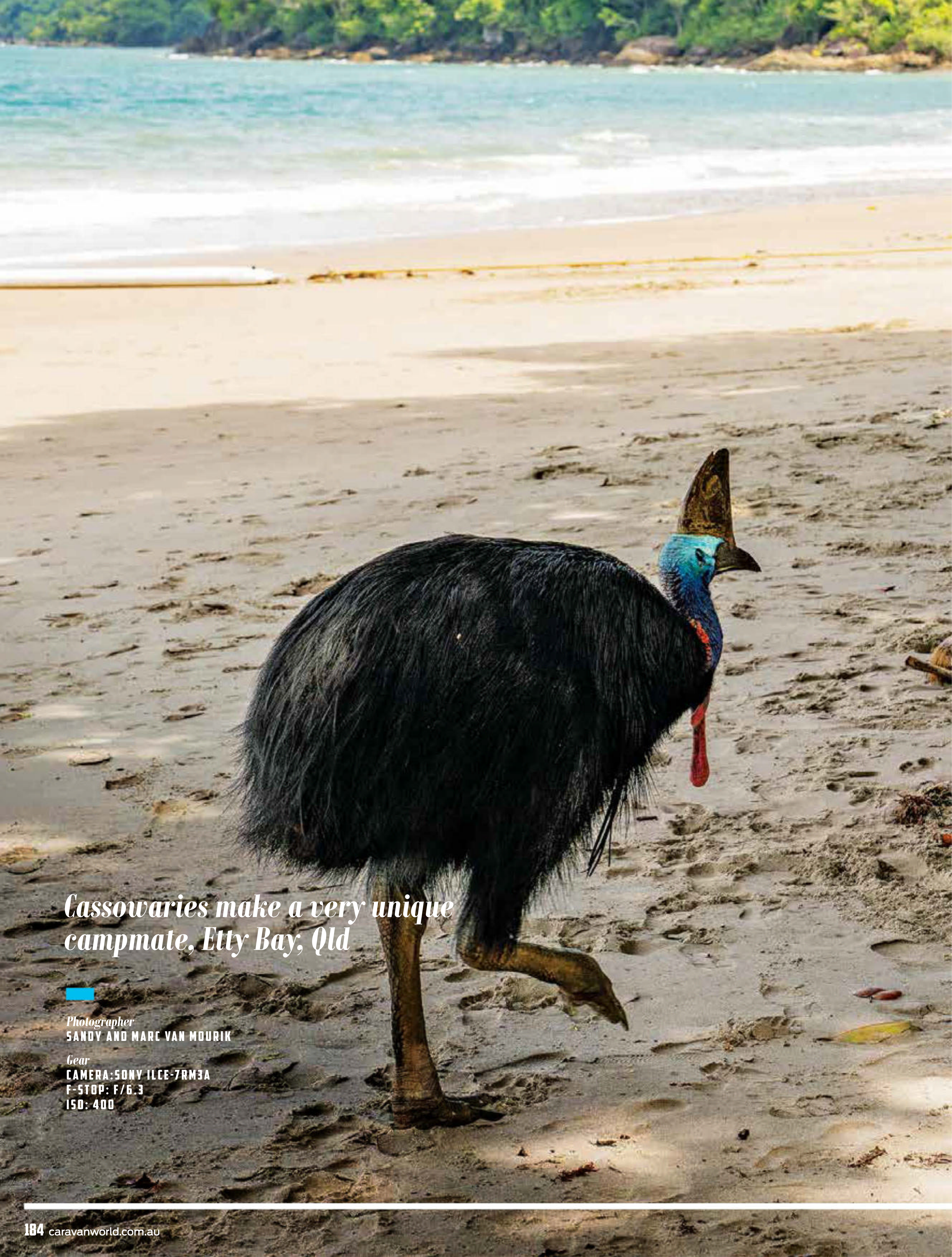
Drop in to the Rutherglen Wine Experience and Tourist Information Centre to get some local info or hire a bike and take a ride along the nearby section of the Murray to Mountains Rail trail through the vineyards and paddocks to Wahgunyah on the Victorian side of the Murray River across from Corowa. Head online for more information: explorerutherglen.com.au.





Tastes of Rutherglen

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Sunset in the main street; Rutherglen Caravan Park; Outside the Caffeine n Machine cafe; Parker Pies; Some of the fare on offer at Scion Wines during Tastes of Rutherglen 2023; Delicious fare at Buller Wines



Cassowaries make a very unique campmate, Etty Bay, Qld

Photographer
SANDY AND MARC VAN MOURIK

Gear
CAMERA:SONY ILCE-7RM3A
F-STOP: F/6.3
ISO: 400

REPLACE A TOILET SUBMERSIBLE PUMP

Our friends at The RV Repair Centre step us through the process of replacing a pump which also includes the access points for draining the tank to hopefully prevent a repeat failure.

Words and Pics John Hughes

Cassette toilets are by the far most commonly available in contemporary caravans. As with your toilet at home, flushing with water is an important part of clearing the bowl. Cassette toilets are available with two different flushing methods. Some systems use the piping that feeds water throughout the van. This means the water comes from the main storage tank/s or a caravan park water supply when connected. When the water is being drawn from the main storage tank/s it is being driven by the main water pump. The alternate system uses a dedicated tank to provide flushing water to the toilet. The tank holds around 15L and is accessed for filling via the same external hatch where you get to the cassette. Inside the dedicated tank is a small submersible water pump that delivers the flush when you press a button.

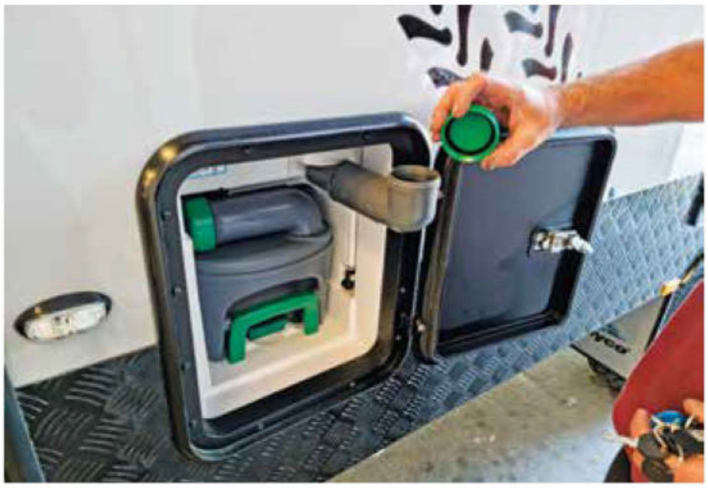
As with all things caravanning, the dedicated tank system has a few pros and cons. An upside to having a separate tank is flushing the toilet does not deplete your main water supply giving slightly more overall capacity. Another benefit is as the tank is independent of your main supply it is possible to top up with non-drinking water when camping. You do have to be careful, though, that contaminants are not introduced into the system that could foul the pump.

Downsides include there is another step in caravan life having to fill another water tank. As far as tasks go, it is pretty quick and simple. The tank needs to be regularly drained and flushed even when using drinking water to prevent any sediment build-up that may foul the pump – again, a pretty easy job.

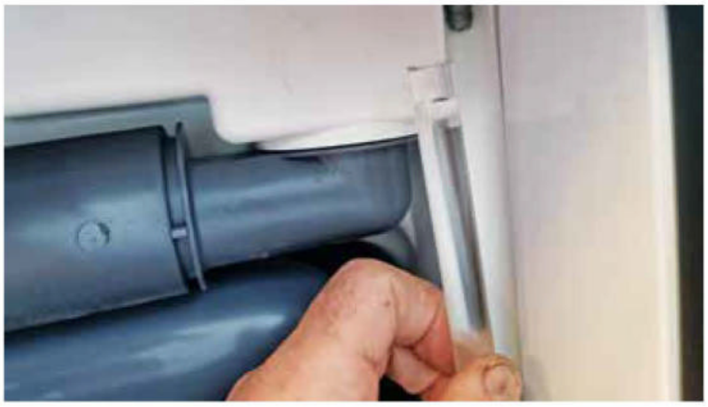
If the submersible pump does become jammed, the motor can burn out rendering the pump inoperable which means you can't flush the toilet. Our friends at The RV Repair Centre step us through the process of replacing a pump which also includes the access points for draining the tank to hopefully prevent a repeat failure. Always refer to the instructions for your particular model.

In this instance, we simulated a pump replacement as the pump was fine. Those with a keen eye may spot that the wiring in steps 12-14 looks fake because it is!

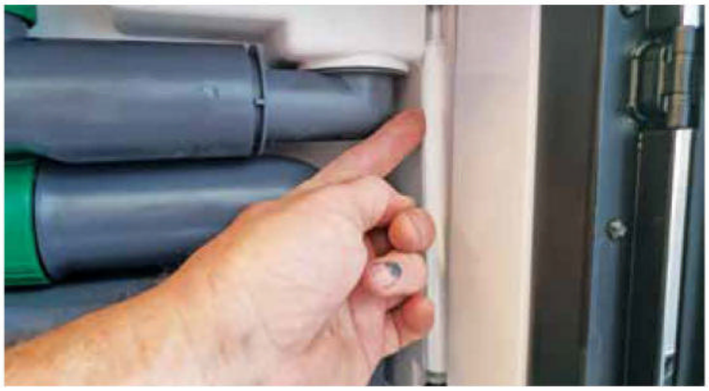
WATER TANK FLUSHING



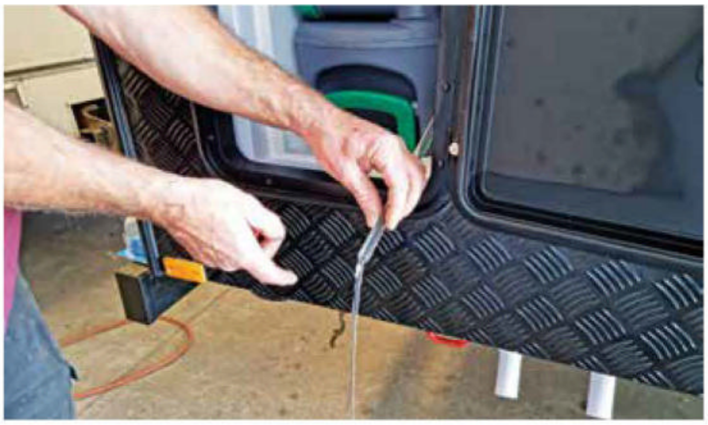
STEP 1 Swivel out the filler port and remove the cap to enable water filling



STEP 3 Pop out the sight glass from the top connection point



STEP 2 The sight level glass also acts as a drain port

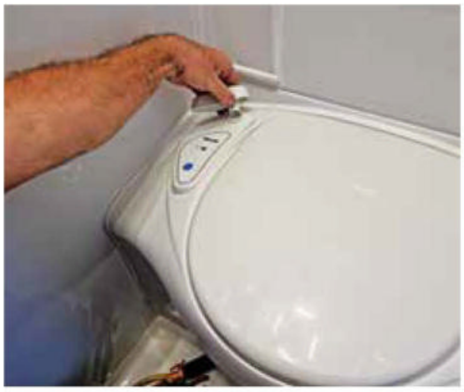


STEP 4 Swivel the sight glass out to enable draining

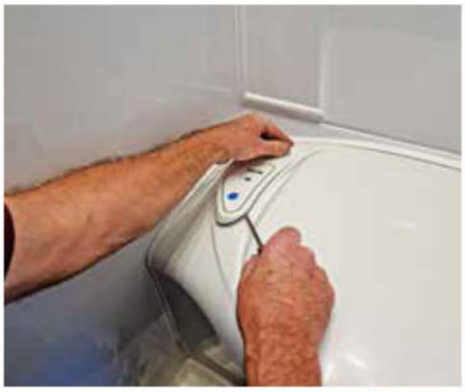
STEP 5 **When finished flushing:**

a. swivel back the filler port anti-clockwise to drain any water from the neck
b. swivel the filler port upright and refit the filler cap
c. refit the sight glass

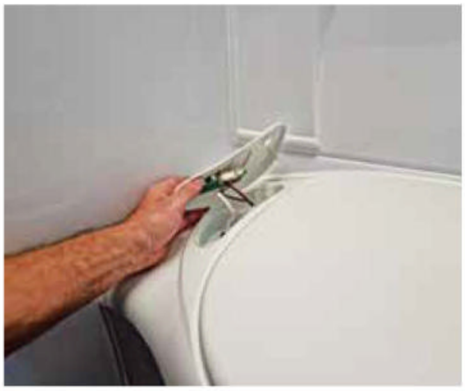
PUMP REPLACEMENT



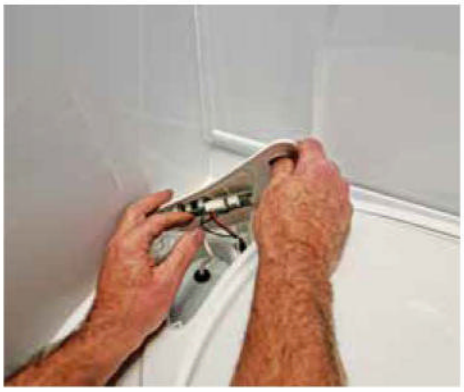
STEP 1 Remove the control panel lever



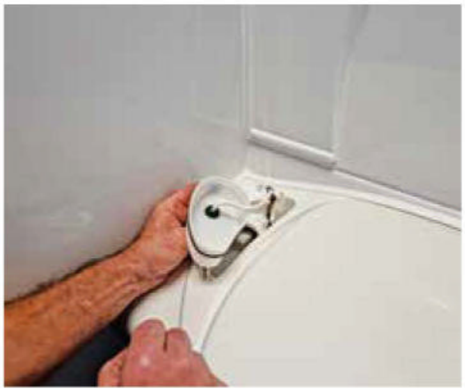
STEP 2 Gently lever the control panel with a screwdriver



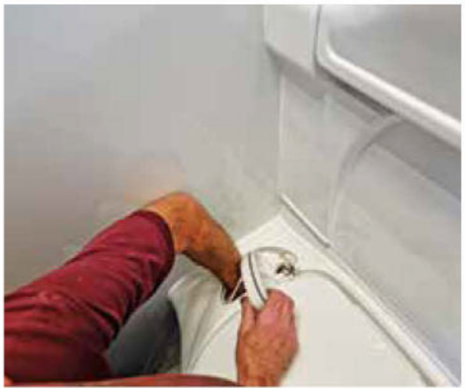
STEP 3 Lift up the control panel



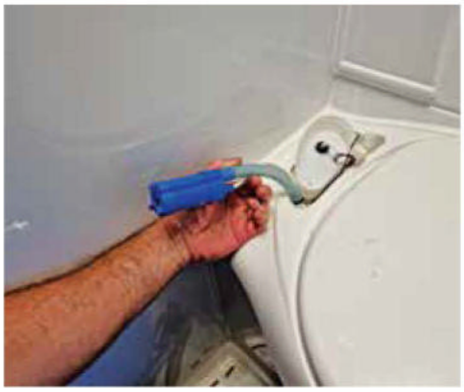
STEP 4 Disconnect the wires to the control panel and remove the panel



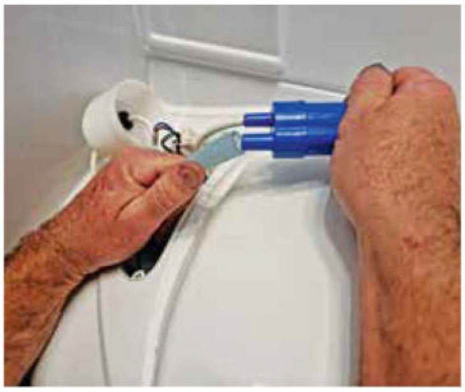
STEP 5 Lift up the control well



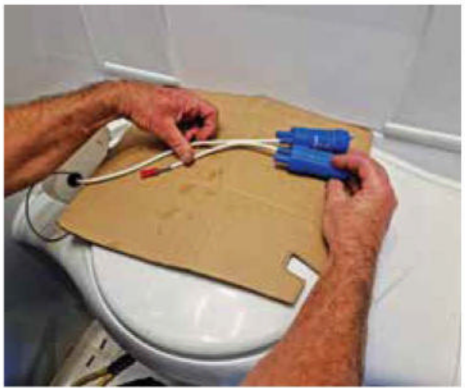
STEP 6 Reach into the tank and feel for the pump and connected hose



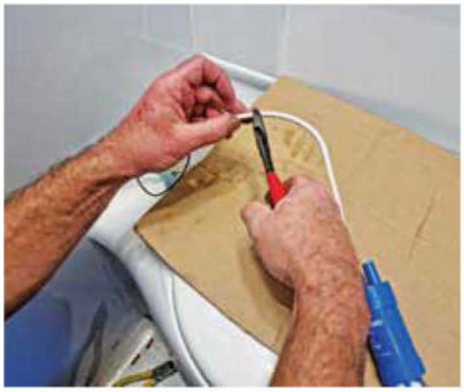
STEP 7 Pull out the pump



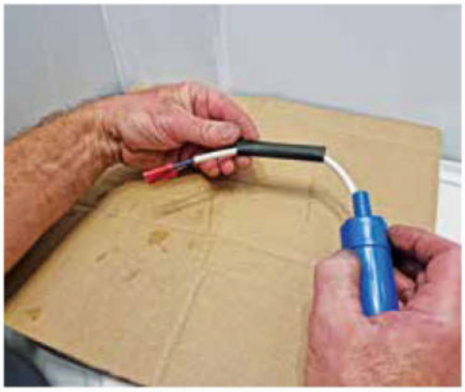
STEP 8 Disconnect the discharge hose to the pump



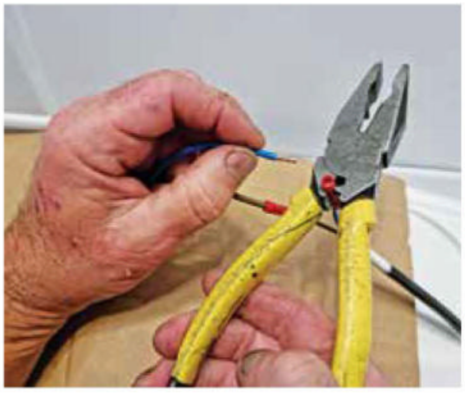
STEP 9 Hold the replacement pump next to the original pump lining up their wires



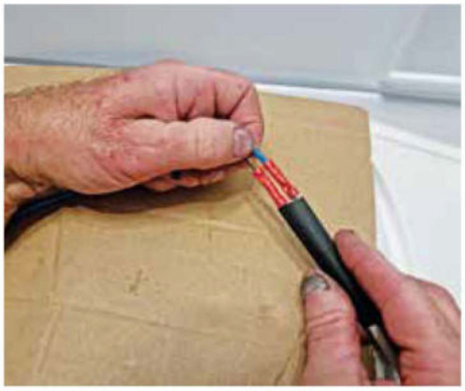
STEP 10 Cut the wire on the original pump at the same length as the replacement pump



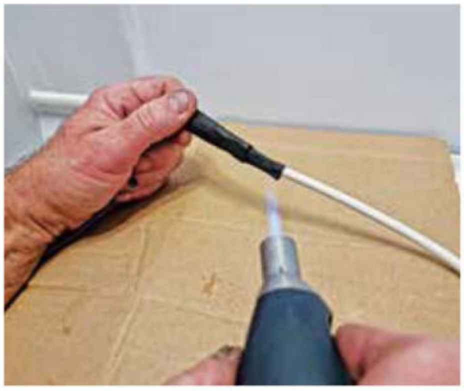
STEP 11 Slide some heat shrink over the replacement pump wire



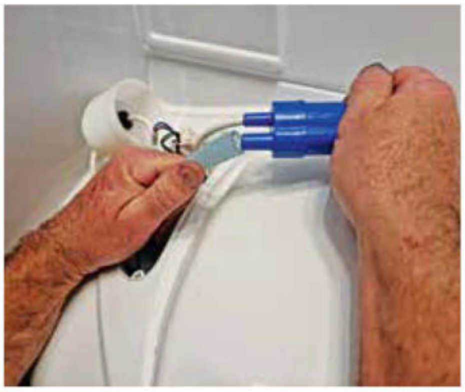
STEP 12 Strip insulation from the existing wires and use the crimp connections to join the replacement pump



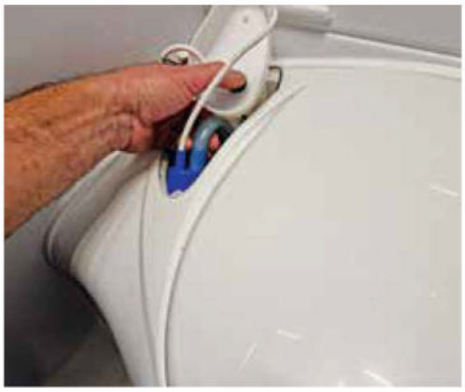
STEP 13 Slide the heat shrink over the newly made connection



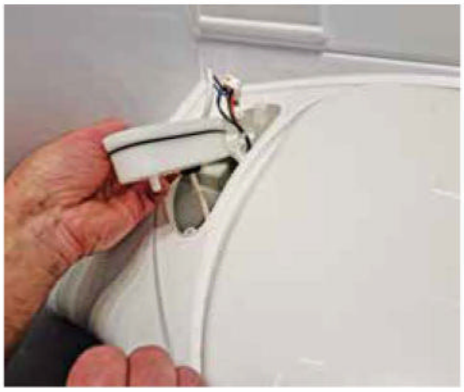
STEP 14 Apply a flame to the heat shrink to seal the connection



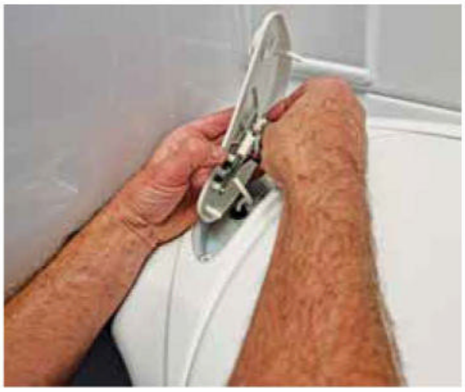
STEP 15 Reconnect the discharge hose to the pump



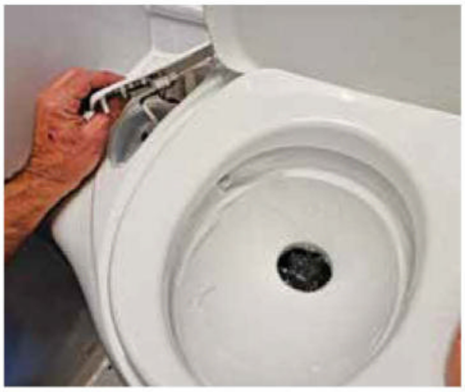
STEP 16 Place the replacement pump in the tank



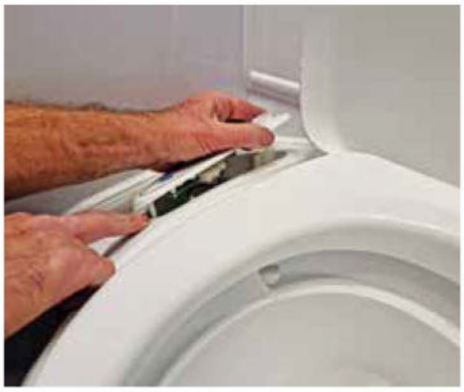
STEP 17 Place the control well in its original position



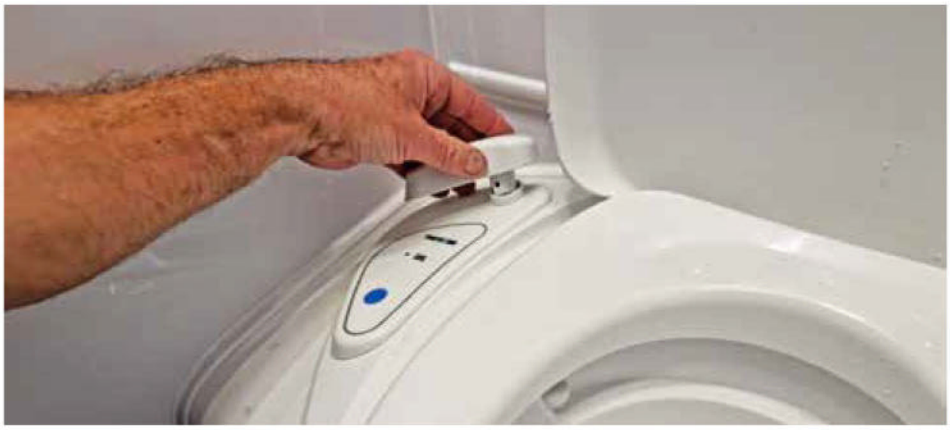
STEP 18 Reconnect the wires to the flush panel



STEP 19 Test flush the pump by pressing the flush button



STEP 20 Refit the control panel



STEP 21 Refit the control panel lever

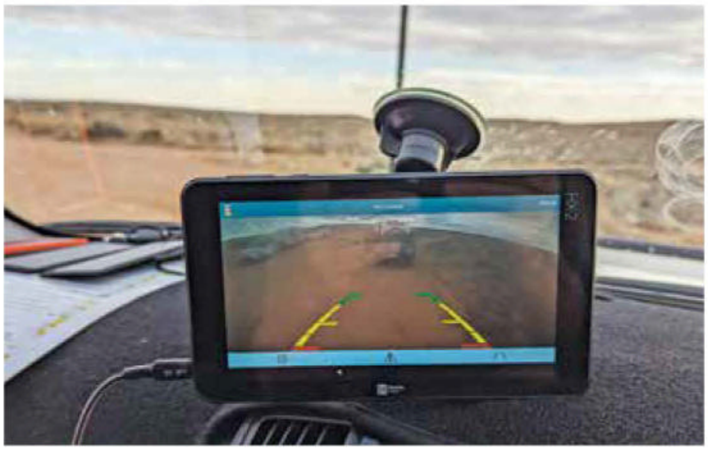
IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL

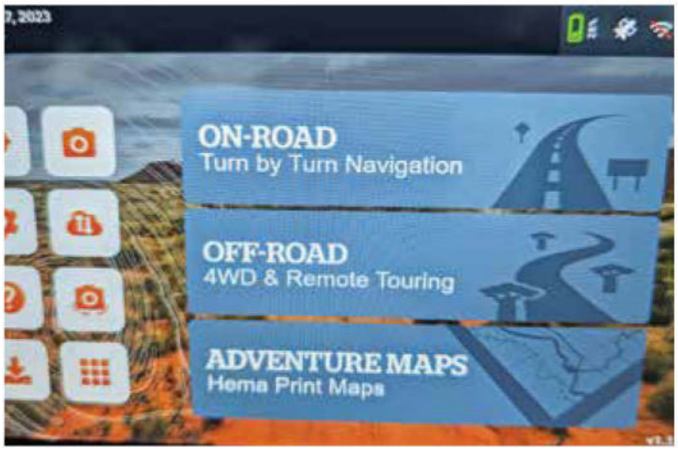
Improper maintenance can lead to injury, death or property damage. Maintenance work of this nature should only be undertaken by people with suitable competence. The information provided is general in nature, not comprehensive and should only be taken as a guide. Individual discretion must be exercised and persons undertaking described tasks do so completely at their own risk. Publishers and creators of this content accept no responsibility for loss or damage.

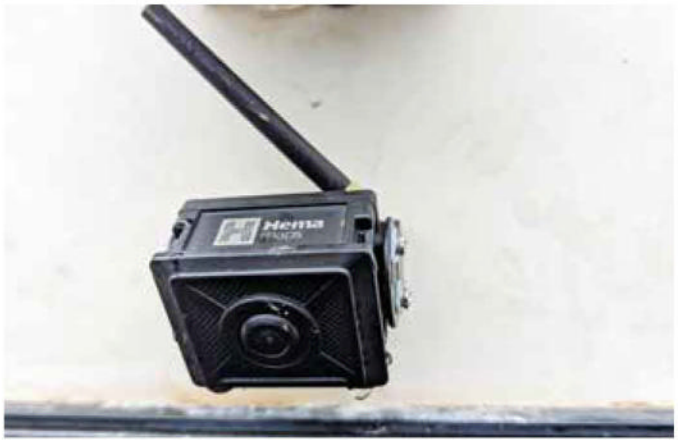
Thanks to Andrew Phillips and the team from the RV Repair Centre, 120 Canterbury Rd, Bayswater Nth Vic 3151, P: (03) 9761 4189.

HEMA HEAVY-DUTY WI-FI REVERSING CAMERA

Words and Pics *John Ford*







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Hema Heavy Duty Wi-Fi Reversing Camera; The camera is mounted high on the rear of the van; A reversing camera is always a good idea; Select the camera icon on the screen

Since its introduction a couple of years back, the Hema HX-2 Navigator has established itself as the most popular digital map on the market. The latest maps have shown me the way to some beautiful locations and helped me find features in strange towns that I would have missed.

And while a wired reversing camera has been available for the HX-2, a wi-fi version has just been added as an option to bring even more versatility to the screen. The new Hema Heavy Duty Wi-Fi Reversing Camera is a well-made, waterproof, wide-angle camera with a range impressive enough to mount on the back of a caravan.

Mounting a rear-view camera is a good idea for a couple of reasons. You can't see vehicles travelling close behind, even with the best mirrors, and there are plenty of occasions when reversing into tight spaces where having the camera will make things easier and safer.

The camera is wi-fi, but it needs 12V power to run. It comes with a mounting bracket and a power lead with a standard round 12V plug. After choosing a suitable place high on the rear of our van, I drilled a 14mm hole through the composite panel into the cabin and ran the power lead through. From there, I could run the camera from a nearby 12V cigarette lighter or the lead to the parking lights. I chose the latter because we always drive with the lights ablaze, and once parked, there would be no drain from the camera. If in doubt, call in a professional. After running the power lead down through the floor and connecting to the taillight, I sealed the holes and tidied up the fit-out.

Connection to the HX-2 is simple. First, set up the wi-fi connection, then select the camera icon on the screen. A new page opens to confirm the link, and the rear view appears. Even on our 22ft external length van, the connection has been stable, and you enjoy a broad 150-degree view. You can switch between maps and camera easily to keep an eye on what's behind. I have found that we generally use the camera on sealed roads between towns where navigation isn't an issue and switch over to the map when on the trickier dirt sections to make sure we catch all the various locations that Hema Maps is so good at highlighting.

The retail price is $299. Available from hemamaps.com.

MSA 4X4 TOWING MIRRORS

MSA 4x4 Accessories has put a lot of time and research into creating the perfect towing mirrors for your vehicle. The patented MSA 4x4 Towing Mirrors are designed for towing caravans, campers, trailers, boats and horse floats, and give optimum visibility by offering full vision of the road and traffic on either side of the vehicle. The mirrors can be adjusted to what best suits you and your vehicle and come in four different positions for any situation. Additionally, when the mirror is rotated horizontally, the mirror's actuator automatically adapts, allowing for standard adjustments (up, down, side to side) with the vehicle's standard mirror controller.

The MSA 4x4 Towing Mirrors have a slightly curved feature on the glass for enhanced vision. They also feature a large single mirror that pivots on a very sturdy extension, which assists in more visibility and less vibration. These mirrors mount onto a vehicle door in the same position as the existing mirrors and retain most factory functions.

These market-leading towing mirrors are ADR compliant. Safety is highly regarded at MSA 4x4, and ensuring customers feel protected while using MSA 4x4 products is a high priority. Another great aspect of this product is the accompanying five-year warranty.

The MSA 4x4 Towing Mirrors have injected moulded die cast aluminium components that deliver a high-quality mirror to withstand Australian conditions. And in 2020, this product won the SEMA Global Media Award, an award program that took place in Las Vegas, USA.

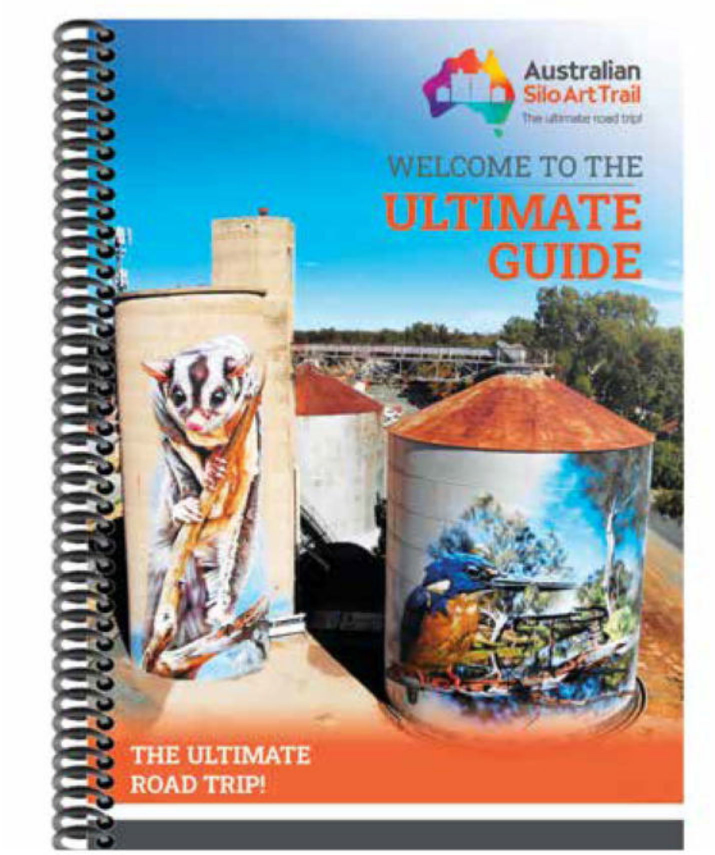
MSA 4x4 Accessories strives to provide the best quality product and are consistently looking into different opportunities to refine and improve all product ranges. Ensuring that all products are kept up to date with all safety requirements is a top priority for MSA 4x4. To find out more, head over to MSA 4x4's website: msa4x4.com.au.

TOP AND BOTTOM Rotating the MSA 4x4 Towing Mirrors; These patented mirrors are designed for all kinds of towing

AUSTRALIAN SILO ART TRAIL:

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE 2023

Words *Amelia Mansell*
Pics *Supplied*



Travelling
South
Australia

AUSTRALIAN
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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE This coffee table guide is a great companion for planning your next art-filled adventure; A selection of pages from the guide; Enjoy wonderful photography throughout the book

There are plenty of beautiful sights to see when road-tripping in Australia, and some of the best of these have been captured on the larger-than-life murals decorating silos in rural towns around the country. And the Australian Silo Art Trail has created an easy way to track them all down and plan your next art-filled road trip.

The Ultimate Guide 2023 is a collaboration of five years of work by the team at The Australian Silo Art Trail to curate the largest art trail in the world. This souvenir coffee table book showcases high-quality photographs of some of the most amazing mega murals around Australia. With almost 230 pages, the spiral-bound book contains 55 silo art locations which were completed at its time of printing, and over 150 water tower artworks.

The painted silo art phenomenon has spread across Australia and was sparked by the desire to renew appreciation and perceptions of Australia's rural towns.

The idea for the Australian Silo Art Trail (ASAT) was inspired after Annette Green and her husband attempted a self-guided silo art road trip around Australia, only to realise there was no single resource to find the sites. This spurred Annette to create a Facebook page for travellers to share information, and then launch the ASAT website (australiansiloarttrail.com) in 2019.

The ASAT website and accompanying guides were created to help others easily track down and plan their visits to the wonderful artworks that have sprung up around the country. And as you will realise within the first few pages, the ASAT hasn't just stopped at painted silo artworks, but also incorporated painted water tanks and buildings and artistic sculptures, which are listed as points of interest for each region.

The Ultimate Guide is broken down into the six states that currently feature painted silo art. The states are then narrowed down into regional trails, with 13 total throughout the book — a journey that would cover more than 10,000km.

At the start of each regional trail, the silo art and points of interest in the area are listed with an accompanying map with the corresponding town locations. Please note, the locations are numbered in alphabetical order, rather than a specific route. Readers can use the map as a handy visual aid and choose the best order depending on what direction you're starting from.

This page also includes an easy reference guide for the artist's name and the completion date of the artwork, as well as ASAT's 'Travellers Tips'. These tips are unique for every region, offering recommendations for caravan parks that are a good base camp to visit the nearby silos, some information on the town, or even advice on the access road to the silo.

The guide then dedicates a page to each painted silo, offering the reader handy information for locating the silo (address, GPS coordinates and a zoomed-in map), a large photo for reference, and more information about the artwork and the artist/s behind it. A similar, albeit shorter, breakdown is given to each of the points of interest to visit in that region.

And as you're working your way through the guide, don't miss the fun quiz questions that pop up to test how much you've been paying attention.

The Ultimate Guide is a great way to learn more about the wonderful artworks around Australia and appreciate them not only for their visual beauty but also the history, inspiration and rural towns that inspired them. So, grab a copy, and start planning your art-filled road trip now!

The Ultimate Guide can be purchased online for $89 at www.siloartstore.com.

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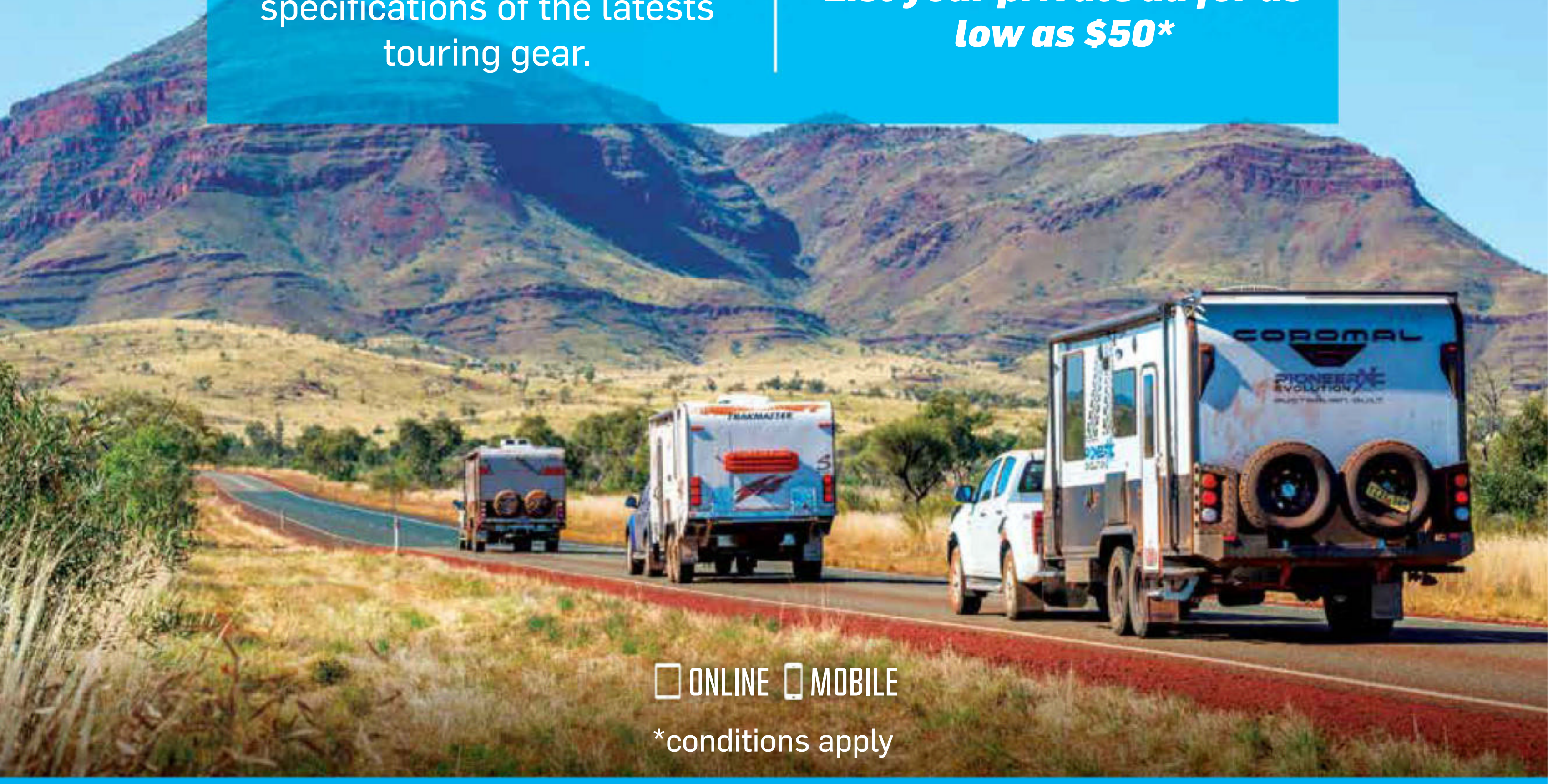
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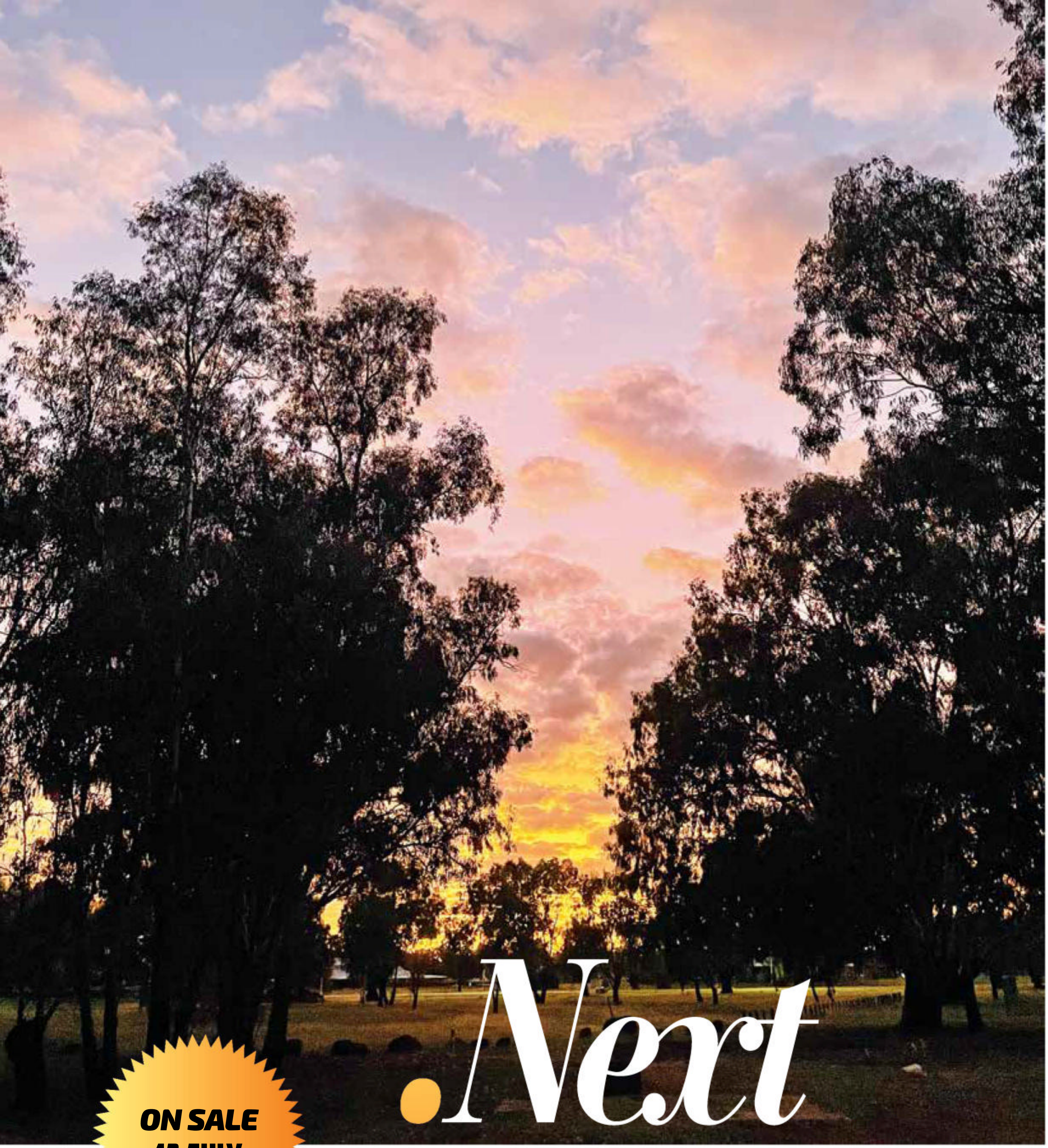
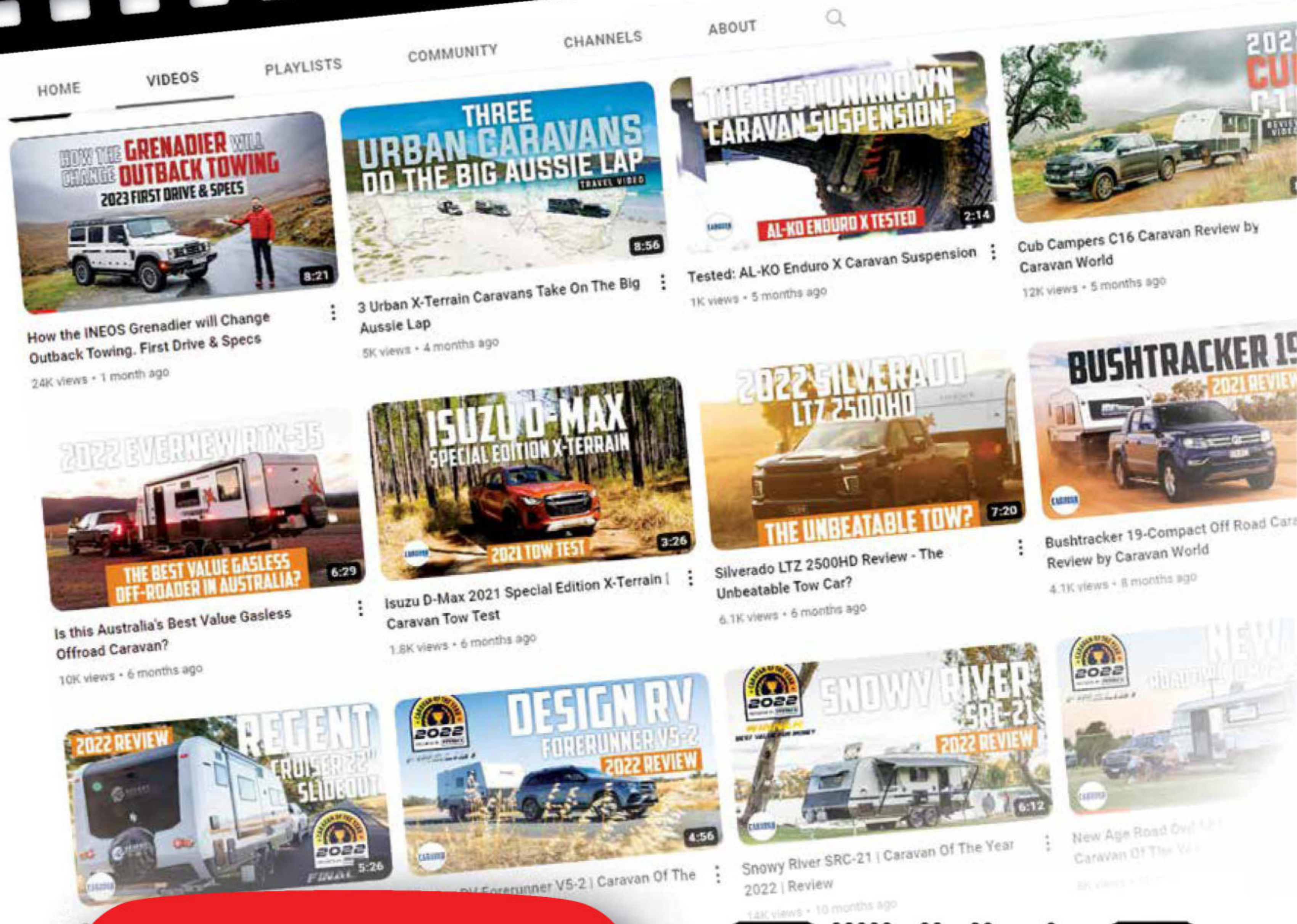


ON SALE
13 JULY

.Next issue

July is bringing not only the second half of the year but also the final six caravans that were reviewed at Caravan of the Year 2023 presented by MSA 4x4. Then journey through the Central West of NSW with Ian Bellert.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